

**AN  
EXAMINATION  
OF  
PRESIDENT  
EDWARDS'S  
INQUIRY**

**ON THE  
FREEDOM OF  
THE WILL.**

**BY JEREMIAH  
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NEW HAVEN:  
DURRIE & PECK.

PHILADELPHIA:  
SMITH & PECK.  
1841.

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By JEREMIAH DAY,  
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District Court of  
Connecticut.

Printed by B. L. Hamlen.

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# AN EXAMINATION, &c.

## INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

*Differences of opinion  
respecting Edwards's  
work on the Will — Its  
relation to scriptural  
theology — It is liable to be  
perverted and  
misapprehended —  
Peculiarities in the  
language of Edwards —  
Arminianism.*

AMONG the causes of the  
lamentable dissensions

















declaration of the Bible against their opinions, than in meeting a logical argument. Others erect a fabric of metaphysical theology; and when a philosophical objection is brought to bear upon their favorite superstructure, they attempt a defense by declaiming loudly against metaphysics. Edwards's Inquiry on the Will was not written to establish a system of his own, different from any which he thought he found in the scriptures; but to try the pretensions of those who so interpret the Bible as to make it

conform to their own philosophy.

There is also another class whose reasonings his Inquiry was intended to meet; those who admit that the doctrines of grace which Edwards believed are really found in the scriptures, but who assign this as a sufficient reason for denying their divine authority; alleging that that cannot be the word of God which contains doctrines inconsistent with their philosophy. These men are not to be confuted by quoting passages from the Bible, the claims of which



But is the liability of the Bible to be perverted, a reason why it should not be read and studied? This is professedly the ground, it is true, on which the *Romish* church prohibits the common people from perusing its sacred pages. But will any *Protestant* admit the validity of such a plea for withholding the word of life from the greater portion of our fellow men?

The advocates of error commonly build with plundered materials. It is by artfully blending truth with falsehood, that they

endeavor to conceal their designs. A large portion of the weapons with which infidels attack Christianity, consists of objections first brought forward by the friends of the truth, and by them effectually answered. The very positions which some profess to derive from the reasoning of Edwards, are most conclusively overthrown by Edwards himself. We have a striking instance of this in his refutation of the popular objection, that his view of the freedom of the will renders fruitless all endeavors to promote







present is a stirring, driving, bustling generation, finding little leisure for deep and long continued thought. We can afford to take a rapid glance of a few select passages, from an author of high reputation. To follow him attentively, through the logical distinctions, and statements, and combinations of argument, in a scientific and methodical treatise, is more than is to be expected from the post-haste readers of the present day. But the Inquiry on the Will is not adapted to the

comprehension of those who read *extracts* only. The author's habits of study were those of thorough and systematic investigation. He has, accordingly, given to his great work on the will a logical structure, a regular chain of reasoning, an adaptation of the several parts to each other. To be understood, it must be read *as a whole*; not in broken and detached portions. The definitions and explanations at the beginning must be attentively examined, to prepare the way for the

course of argument which follows. Each successive portion of the book is to be illustrated by the reasoning which has preceded. This will require a frequent re-examination of the parts previously read. How few are found willing to devote to it the time and effort which are requisite to enter fully into the views of the author. The rugged path through which he leads us is not strewn with flowers of fancy, nor is our toil beguiled by exciting incidents and poetic imagery. The mine is to be explored, not for the gems

which sparkle on its walls, but for the treasures which are to be drawn from its depths.

One reason why Edwards's writings may not be as well understood at the present day, as they were on their first publication, is, that various schemes of metaphysical theology have sprung up since, claiming an affinity with his views, and seeking support from the sanction of his great name; though there is reason to believe, that many of their prominent points are such as he would never have



theory. In this way, he is rendered responsible for the numerous additions which his admirers have made to his work.

The *extent* of Edwards's Treatise, and, of course, the labor of reading it through, is increased by his purpose of not only dislodging his opponents from their main positions, but of pursuing them into all their by-paths, and places of concealment. He is not satisfied with meeting them boldly, and causing them to fall back, in the open field; but he aims to leave them no opportunity

of retreating. Thus he has devoted a long section to the consideration of the comparatively unimportant point, the power of the will to make a choice between things *perfectly indifferent*, for instance, which of two peppercorns to take; and another portion of the treatise, of nearly the same extent, to the Creator's "placing, in different parts of the world, particles or atoms of matter that are perfectly equal and alike."

*[Freedom of the Will, Part II, Sec. 6, and Part IV, Sec. 8.]*

There are some peculiarities in the *language* of Edwards, which require particular attention, on the part of his readers. In the lapse of a century, new terms and phrases in mental philosophy have come into use; new meanings are attached to words then in use; and new classifications of the powers of the mind have been introduced. In the time of Edwards, the prevalent philosophy, especially in New England, was that of Locke; and his language was frequently adopted by metaphysical













## SECTION 1: DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS.

*Broad signification given to the term will—It is made to include emotions and passions—Immanent and imperative acts—Threefold division of mental powers—Volition—Choice—Preference—Desire—Volition implies an agent—Voluntary acts—Determination of the will—Definition of motive—External and internal motives — Greatest apparent good — Immediate and remote*







## THE WILL.

To the term will, he has given a broader signification than has commonly been assigned it by European writers. They limit it to what he calls *imperative* acts; to those determinations of the mind that are immediately followed by some bodily motion or mental state which is dependent on the will. According to Mr. Locke, it is “a power to begin or forbear, continue, or end, several actions of our minds, and motions of



and all acts of the will are acts of the affections. All exercises of the will are, in some degree or other, exercises of the soul's appetite or aversion; or which is the same thing, of its love or hatred. The soul wills one thing rather than another, or chooses one thing rather than another, no otherwise than as it loves one thing more than another." [*Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England, Part I.*] "The affections are only certain modes of the exercise of the will." [*Freedom of the Will, Part III, Sec. 4.*] "The

affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.” [*Treatise on the Affections, Part I.*] Yet Edwards himself finds occasion to discriminate between *immanent* and *imperative* acts. “There are two kinds of exercises of grace. 1. There are those that some call *immanent* acts; that is, those exercises of grace that remain within the soul; that begin and are terminated there, without any immediate relation to anything to be done outwardly, or to be brought

to pass in practice. 2. There is another kind of acts of grace, that are more strictly called practical or effective exercises, because they immediately respect *something to be* done. They are the exertions of grace in the *commanding* acts of the will, directing the outward actions." The *practical* exercise of grace, he speaks of, as "that exertion of the mind which issues and terminates in what they call the *imperate* acts of the will." [*Religious Affections, Part III, Sign 12.*]

The place which is here



*inclined* with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined *to* them, or is disinclined and averse *from* them; or is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things as an indifferent, unaffected spectator ; but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty,”—“as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will.” [*Treatise on the Affections, Part I.*]

Though President Edwards agrees with many















to be in emotions or affections, others in purposes, others in imperative or executive acts. Had he confined his reasoning to one of these classes, the others would have eluded the force of his arguments. He must lay his foundation broad enough to enable him to include them all within the scope of his inquiry. He himself considers “true religion as consisting, in great part, in *holy affections*.” This is a point which he has undertaken to prove by a regular course of argument. [*Treatise on the*



sufficiently careful to apprise his readers of the limited application of the reasoning.

He has also given a broad signification to the words *choice* and *choosing*. “An act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.—Whatever names we call the act of the will by, a choosing, refusing, approving, disapproving, liking, disliking, embracing, rejecting, determining, directing, commanding, forbidding, inclining or being averse to, being pleased or displeased with; all may be



reduced to this of choosing" [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec. 1.*] The expressions *liking* or *disliking*, *inclining* or *being averse to*, *being pleased* or *displeased with*, belong properly to emotions or affections, while *determining*, *directings*, *commanding*, and *forbidding*, are applicable to imperative acts only. An emotion chooses an *object* or *thing*; an imperative volition chooses an *action*. The action is commonly chosen, as a means of obtaining some chosen object. The



contrary, or rather than the *want* or nonexistence of that thing.” He uses the word preference to express that which is opposed to “a state of perfect indifference.” The difference between Edwards and Locke, with respect to the application of the word preference to volition, is easily explained, by adverting to the fact, that Edwards gives the will a much broader signification than Locke; the latter confining the term to *imperative* or *executive* acts. Both agree that the preference of an

*act*, immediately dependent on the will, is volition. But the preference of an *object* or *thing* does not come within Mr. Locke's definition; while it is included in President Edwards's, which comprises affections, as well as imperative acts of will.

In reference to the frequently agitated question, whether volitions are *desires*, it is important to mark the difference between the *limited* and the *extended* definition of the will. There are desires which are not *executive*

volitions. But they may be emotions or affections, and therefore acts of will in President Edwards's sense. Imperative volitions, if it is proper to call them desires at all, are not desires of *objects* or *things*, but of *acts*; of bodily or mental acts, which immediately follow volition. A thirsty man desires a draught of water, which is offered him. This is an emotion. He wills to move his hand to take the water. This is an executive act; which is, perhaps, more properly called a command than a desire. Imperative volition



of *mind*; that is, it is the *mind's* drawing up a conclusion, or coming to a choice." Volitions are not effects of such a nature, that the man is only the *subject* of them. He is truly their author. They are *his* acts, and not the acts of another. They are not brought into being by some other cause, without his agency. This agency is so essential to their nature, that it is that of which they *consist*. A man's willing, and his agency in willing, are one and the same thing. They are no more distinct, than the *motion* of a body









*who* or *what* it is that wills; but, *why* the man wills, and why he wills one way rather than another. Edwards does not put an interval between a man's acts, and his agency in those acts. His *present* agency may, indeed, be a consequence of his *previous* agency. His present acts may be carrying into execution an antecedent purpose. "The will is said to be determined, when *in consequence* of some action or influence, its choice is directed to and fixed upon a particular





unite their strength, to induce the mind," &c. [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec. 2.*] evidently implying, that in the use of the terms volition, choice, &c., the agency of the mind is to be considered as included.

## VOLUNTARY ACTS.

There is an ambiguity in the word *voluntary*, as used by Edwards and other New England writers. By a voluntary act, European authors commonly mean an act which is *dependent*



















## MOTIVES.

One of the terms to which Edwards has given a broad signification is *motive*; a very important word, in the controversy concerning the Freedom of the Will. This is his definition; “By motive, I mean the whole of that which moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly. Many particular things may concur, and unite their strength, to induce the mind; and when it is so, all













they do not come at his mere command. They do not appear, when he simply wills or purposes to have them. There must be some other motive, to call them forth. The younger Edwards speaks of "motive, in the *large* sense of President Edwards, including reasons and external objects, with the taste and bias of the mind." When external objects are spoken of as motives, the term external is not to be considered as confined to *material* objects; but as including everything which does not belong to the









"move, excite, or invite the mind to volition. The notion of *exciting*, is exerting influence, to cause the effect to arise, or come forth into existence."

## THE GREATEST APPARENT GOOD.

In explaining the nature of motives, President Edwards gives us to understand what he means by the phrase *the greatest apparent good* [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec. 2.*] It is not always that which is, *in reality*, the greatest







obtained by his merely ordering it. It will not come at his bidding. The act of drinking is willed as a *means* of procuring the enjoyment which he seeks. The objects of what Edwards calls *affections*, which he considers as belonging to the will, are not commonly *actions*, but *things*. What he calls the *remote* object of volition, is, in most cases, the primary object of affection or desire, and that which is frequently spoken of as the direct object of choice. A purse of guineas is offered to a man. He puts forth his





*ordering* that action.

That which is the greatest apparent good to a man, is not always an *object of sense*, or any merely personal gratification. It may be the prosperity of the divine kingdom, the welfare of his country, the discharge of his duty, obedience to the dictates of conscience. These may be more pleasing to him than sensual indulgence, or the rewards of ambition or avarice. “It is most agreeable to some men,” says Edwards, “to follow their *reason*; and to others, to follow their *appetites*.”





object; the particular temper which the mind has *by nature*, or that has been introduced or established by *education*, example, custom, or some other means; or the frame or state that the mind is in, on a particular occasion. That object which appears agreeable to one, does not so to another. And the same object does not always appear alike agreeable to the *same* person, at different times.”

**THE STRONGEST MOTIVE.**

When different motives are compared together, some may be considered as having a more powerful influence on the will than others. It is the opinion of Edwards, that “it is that motive which, as it stands in view of the mind, is the **STRONGEST**, that *determines* the will.” [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec. 2.*] This he undertakes to *prove*, in a succeeding part of his work. In the section before us, he states what he *means* by the strongest motive. “That motive which has a less degree of



It has been said, that Edwards has not shewn in what the strength of motives consists. He has told us distinctly what he would be understood to *mean* by the strength of motives. “I think it must be allowed by all,” he observes, “that everything which is properly called a motive, excitement, or inducement, to a perceiving, willing agent, has some sort and degree of *tendency*, or advantage, to move or excite the will, *previous* to the effect, or to the act of the will excited. This *previous tendency* of









changes, which are either agreeable or disagreeable, in the works of nature, and the transformations of art. “Particularly to enumerate,” he observes, “all things pertaining to the mind's view of the objects of volition, which have influence, in their appearing agreeable to the mind, would be a matter of no small difficulty, and might require a treatise by itself.” He speaks, however, of the nature and circumstances of the *object* proposed to choice, the pleasant or unpleasant *concomitants* and







will is always determined by the strongest motive, carries much of its own evidence with it." Still the definition does not close the door to discussion on the subject. The real points of inquiry are, whether motives have *any* determining influence over the will; and if they have, whether the influence of one motive is ever *greater* than that of another. These are the points which Edwards discusses, when he comes to the argumentative part of his book. For the present, he is giving definitions and











where he had not even attempted to argue.

## CAUSE OF VOLITION.

The inquiry respecting the determination of the will, brings before us the subject of the *cause* of volition. We have here another important term, which frequently occurs in President Edwards's Inquiry. Although he postponed the definition of it, till he had entered upon the argumentative part of his book, yet it may, without impropriety, be









the effect, and efficacy, in reference to the cause. To every event, there are thousands and millions of antecedents, to which it has no relation, except priority in the order of time. But in the relation of a cause to its effect, there is not only antecedence, but *influence*.

"Dependence on the influence of a cause, is the very notion of an effect. If there be no such relation between one thing and another, consisting in the connection and dependence of one thing on the influence of another, then it is certain there is no

such relation between them, as is signified by the terms cause and effect.”  
[*Freedom of the Will, Part II, Sec. 8.*]

The word dependence may sometimes be used to express the relation of an effect, not to its proper cause, but to what may be called *causa sine qua non*, a mere *condition, without* which the effect could not take place. In this sense, *space* is a condition, without which *matter* could not exist. Every material substance must occupy a certain portion of space. But space has



nothing to do in bringing matter into existence. It is not, in the proper sense, the *cause* of matter. A body cannot *move*, except in space. But space, though a *condition* of the motion, is not the cause. Every volition implies an *object*. There can be no choice, where there is nothing to be chosen, nothing in view of the mind. Many consider objects of thought as *conditions* of choice, who do not admit, that they have any determining influence upon the will; that they are properly *causes* of volition.





Edwards does not maintain, that every antecedent which is *certainly connected* with a consequent event, is of course its cause. To render it a cause, it must be “so connected, that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event is true.” Our foreknowledge that the sun will rise to-morrow, is certainly connected with that event; but it is not the *cause* of the sun’s rising. The foreknowledge of God that he would create the world, was infallibly connected with the work of



giving actual being to those which would best accomplish his designs of benevolence. His infinite knowledge *of possible* events, may be considered as a ground of his purposes; and his purposes, the ground of his knowledge of what he would actually bring to pass.

But what does President Edwards mean by a *negative* cause? Is it absolute nothing? Or is it something which has no influence as a cause? After devoting so large a portion of his work to the purpose



manner, the cause of the freezing of the water, as its approach in the spring is the cause of their thawing. But yet the withdrawment or absence of the sun is an antecedent, with which these effects in the night and winter are connected, and on which they depend ; and is one thing that belongs to the ground and reason why they come to pass at that time, rather than at other times; though the absence of the sun [*Freedom of the Will, Part II, Sec. 3*] is nothing positive, nor has any positive influence." A







## SECTION 2: PHILOSOPHICAL NECESSITY.

Common *necessity* — *It implies supposable opposition of will* — *General and particular necessity* — *Philosophical necessity* — *Necessary existence* — *Different grounds of necessary existence* — *Consequential necessity* — *Necessary connection of events* — *Are volitions necessarily connected with any antecedent except divine foreknowledge?* — *Is*



be inconsistent with accountability. It requires but a slight variation of the language in which this familiar and acknowledged truth is expressed, to convert it into the universal proposition, that *all* necessity is inconsistent with accountability. Whatever, then, you wish to prove to be inconsistent with accountability, you have only to call it necessity, and you will gain your point, with that very numerous class with whom words are arguments. If the impression from a simple statement is too slight, you



explaining and defining necessity. Still there is reason to believe, that the meaning which he intends to give the term, is not always well understood. He does not appear to have aimed to present a scientific view of all the varieties of necessity; but to mark those distinctions which he would have occasion to apply in the course of his inquiry. He first explains the *customary* signification of the term necessity, in the common intercourse of life. "That is necessary," he observes, "in the original

















supposed or supposable.—  
*Metaphysical* or  
*philosophical* necessity is  
nothing different from  
their *certainty*. I speak not  
now of the certainty of  
*knowledge*, but the  
certainty that is in *things*  
*themselves*, which is the  
*foundation* of the certainty  
of the knowledge of them.”  
He then gives a formal  
definition of the term.

*"Philosophical necessity  
is really nothing else than  
the FULL AND FIXED  
CONNECTION between the  
things signified by the  
subject and predicate of a  
proposition which affirms*













metaphysical sense. And in this sense, I use the word necessity, in the following discourse, when I endeavor to prove, that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty.” He proceeds to specify, under distinct heads, some of the *grounds* of necessary existence. “The subject and predicate of a proposition which affirms existence of something, may have a full, fixed, and certain connection, several ways. (1.) They may have a full and perfect connection *in and of themselves*; because it may imply a



true, that such a thing has been.”

The next head, that of *consequential* necessity, calls for very special attention, as it is this which occupies so prominent a place in almost every part of Edwards’s book on the Will. “(3.) The subject and predicate of a proposition which affirms something to be, may have a real and certain connection *consequentially*; and so the existence of the thing may be *consequentially* necessary; as it may be *surely and firmly connected* with something

































rendered so, by a sure connection with their causes; in the other, we apply the term to that sure connection itself which renders the volitions necessary. According to the views of Edwards, the one always *implies* the other. He holds not only to a moral necessity of *volitions*, but to a moral necessity of the *connection* of volitions with their causes.

The younger Edwards, whose object, in his *Essays on Liberty and Necessity*, is to explain and defend the opinions of his father, in



volition itself. Again, "*All necessity of moral acts is moral necessity.*" [Page 6, 13, 87.] He repeatedly asserts, that certainty of moral actions is moral necessity ;—*all* the moral necessity for which we plead." [Page 156, 158, 160, 166, 168.] He should have said, "all the moral necessity of volitions themselves;" for he certainly held also to a moral necessity of the *connection* between volitions and their causes. He was here arguing with an opponent, Dr. Samuel West, who admitted the







— There must be a certainty in things, before they are certainly known. For certainty of knowledge is nothing else but knowing or discerning the certainty there is in the things themselves which are known.” [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec. 3, and Part II, Sec. 12.*]

“No doubt,” says Dr. Edwards, “knowledge in the Deity is the same thing with *subjective* certainty, or certain knowledge; but it is not the same with *objective* certainty, or the truth which is the object of the divine knowledge.”



















*should not be.*" Of course, it has all the variety of significations, which the positive term necessity has. Thus, things may be said to be impossible, either with a *general*, or a *particular* impossibility," according as they are impossible, *all* things considered, or in reference only to a particular person, time, or place. Things may be impossible *in their own nature*; for example, two straight lines cannot enclose a space; or they may be *consequentially* impossible. While the planets are moved in their

orbits, by any cause, it is impossible they should remain at rest. That may be *morally* impossible, which is not *naturally* impossible, in Edwards's sense of the terms.

## CONTINGENCE.

A term which, in metaphysical discussion, is frequently used to express the absence of necessity, is *contingence*. President Edwards has explained the difference between two significations of the word; according to one of which,

an event is said to be contingent, when it takes place without any *known* or *observed* cause; according to the other, a contingent event is supposed to have *no cause whatever*, with which it has a fixed and certain connection. With the latter meaning, he frequently uses the term in his Inquiry on the Will. There is also a *third* sense in which he occasionally employs it, especially in the section on the foreknowledge of God, to signify that which is *opposed to certainty*; to the certain future existence



These are the meanings with which *Edwards* uses' the term contingent. But significations still different, and in some respects opposite, are given it by other writers. All created things are said to be contingent, because they are not self-existent, but dependent on the will of the Creator. If his purpose had been different, *they* might have been different, or might not have existed at all. Things depending on *human* volitions are also said to be contingent, as they might have been different, if the volitions







any influence under which it acts, determines what the volitions will be. In the philosophical use of the term contingency, it generally implies opposition to some kind of necessity. But as there are various meanings of necessity, there are corresponding varieties in the signification of contingency. It is used to signify, that a thing is not necessary *in its own nature*. It is also used, in contradistinction from *consequential* necessity, to denote that which is not dependent on a cause. This



## SECTION 3: NATURAL AND MORAL NECESSITY.

*Moral causes and motives — Is the distinction between natural and moral necessity a distinction without a difference? — By moral necessity, Edwards means a sure and perfect connection — Moral necessity is inconsistent with entire opposition of will — Common necessity admits of opposition from the will — Moral necessity relates to the influence which gives direction to*





expressions *moral causes* and *moral motives*, are evidently intended to mean the causes and motives of moral *effects* that is, of right or wrong *volitions*, though the causes and motives themselves may not always have a moral character. "The cause with which the effect is connected," says the writer, is "either some previous disposition, or some motive exhibited to the understanding." Now motives presented to the understanding, are not always right or wrong in themselves. They may be









another. That cannot be moral necessity, which is no necessity at all. “Moral necessity,” says Edwards, “may be as *absolute* as natural necessity; that is, the effect may be as perfectly connected with its moral cause, as a natural necessary effect is with its natural cause. Whether the will, in *every* case, is necessarily determined by the strongest motive; — yet I suppose none will deny, but that in *some* cases, a previous bias and inclination, or the motive presented, may be so powerful, that the act of the













be as *perfectly connected* with its moral cause, as a natural necessary effect is with its natural cause."

"Between these two kinds of necessity, there is a distinction or difference that is very important in its consequences. Which

difference does not lie so much in the nature of the *connection*, as in the two *terms connected*. The

*cause* with which the effect is connected, is of a particular kind, viz. that which is of a moral nature ; either some previous habitual disposition, or some motive exhibited to



the case of moral necessity, which is a certainty of the inclination and will itself; which does not admit of the supposition of a will to oppose and resist it. For it is absurd to suppose the same individual will to oppose itself in its present act; or the present choice to be opposite to and resisting present choice; as absurd as it is to talk of two contrary motions in the same moving body at the same time.” It may perhaps be thought, that although there is an absurdity in supposing a present act or state of the will to be



*prevailing* inclination cannot be opposed to the very influence which causes it to prevail. The man who yields to a particular temptation cannot, at the moment of yielding, be fully opposed to its persuasive power. He is neither opposed to willing as he does, nor to that which *induces* him to will thus. He may, at one time, comply with influence, which, at another time, he effectually resists. But, in neither case, is the predominant inclination opposed to the motives which induce him







necessity, but all other kinds except moral necessity, so that it either *may* or *may not be* opposed to the will. In this sense, a man may be said to be under a necessity of remaining in prison, though he is *willingly* confined there, to escape the violence of an exasperated mob. We often rejoice in the necessary flight of time, when it carries us forward to some anticipated scene of enjoyment.

The necessity in these and similar cases, relates to something *external* to the

will. But the inquiry may be made, what is natural necessity in relation to the will itself? It is the necessity to which a man is commonly subject of willing *either one way or another*. He cannot cease to will as long as he retains his reason, and objects are presented to his choice. But the influence which gives a particular *direction* to acts of the will, belongs to *moral* necessity. This includes *all* the considerations which induce the mind to will one way rather than another. Nothing is left to be





There may be opposition between different affections of the same mind, while the *predominant* affection is morally necessary. A man's will *at one time* may be opposed to his will at another time. There may be a struggle between present gratification and the prospect of future good; between self-indulgence and a regard to the welfare of others. But the *prevailing* inclination cannot be, at the same time, opposed to itself or to the motives with which it complies. The very nature

of the case renders the supposition absurd.

The amount of the objection which is most commonly brought against Edwards's view of moral necessity is, that with all his explanations, he makes it out to be *real* necessity; not a high degree of probability; not an unmeaning figure of speech; but an infallible connection between moral acts and their causes. His opponents insist upon it, that his distinction between moral and natural necessity, is a distinction without a difference; in



## SECTION 4: NATURAL AND MORAL INABILITY.

*The distinction not always understood by those who use the terms — Moral inability lies in the predominant inclination of the agent — It may be previous to the act of choice — Inability in relation to external conduct, to imperative volitions, and to emotions — Natural inability with respect to external actions, and with respect to the will—Query with respect to the propriety of Edwards's*























he is, nevertheless, morally unable to will, because he is under a *stronger* inducement, a controlling inclination, to the contrary. The slothful man may have many motives for active exertion, while he is under a more powerful propensity to remain idle. “Moral inability,” says Edwards, “consists either in a *want* of inclination, or the strength of a *contrary* inclination that is, the inability to will in a particular way, is either the want of inclination to will in that way, or the strength of inclination to will the









negative answer to the inquiry, it is common to assign *this* as a reason, that our inability is the very thing in which our guilt consists, the want of a right inclination. That cannot, it is said, be an excuse for sin. which is itself sin. This is very correct, when the application is to *external conduct*. The reason why a man does not perform his duty, is because he *will not*; and in this consists his guilt. The same reason may be given, in the case of *purposes*, and of *imperative* volitions. These are wrong, because the





## NATURAL INABILITY.

Some may, perhaps, be ready to ask, if President Edwards has comprised, under the head of *moral* inability, all that want of influence, or that contrary influence, which inclines the will in one direction rather than another, what place has he left for *natural* inability? In answer to this, it may be observed, that there are *some* qualifications which are necessary for acting or willing in *any* direction ; some prerequisites which



want of natural capacity or strength; either capacity of understanding, or external strength.” [*Freedom of the Will, Part I, Sec. 4; Part III, Sec. 4.*] Natural inability, with respect to external actions is, according to Edwards, an inability of *doing as we will*; a “want of connection” between these actions and the will. Natural inability with respect to *the will itself*, is such a want of capacity or opportunity of knowledge, as prevents us, in the case supposed, from willing *either right or wrong*. A















given to this philosophical phraseology, among those who never take the pains to inform themselves of his cautious definitions and explanations. The nature of the investigation upon which he had entered, required, indeed, that he should avoid the common error of disputants, in giving their *own* meaning *exclusively* to the leading terms in the discussion; and disregarding the sense in which they are understood, by writers on the opposite side. How are you to meet the arguments of a man who gives to the



















so apply the words in a very inconsistent manner. This habitual connection of ideas will deceive and confound us in our reasonings and discourses, wherein we pretend to use these terms in that manner as terms of art.” “There is a grand illusion in the pretended demonstration of Arminians from common sense. The main strength of all these demonstrations, lies in that prejudice that arises through the *insensible change* of the use and meaning of such terms as *liberty, able, unable,*





man, and in the circumstances in which he is placed, which will, in the present life, *certainly prevent* both saints and sinners from yielding perfect obedience to the will of God. Secondly, that this inability, if it is proper to call it inability, is of such a kind that it furnishes *no excuse* for disobedience. These truths taken together, the unrenewed sinner has a settled unwillingness to admit. He will either believe that he is under no inability of any kind to comply with the demands of the law and the



feared that many professing Christians cherish the same erroneous view, as an apology for not being *perfect* in holiness. It has been thought that these pleas may be cut off, by distinguishing between that kind of inability which releases from obligation, and that which is no excuse for disobedience. But many intelligent divines maintain, that what Edwards calls moral inability, is *natural* inability; while others affirm that it is *no* inability. The latter consider it to be improper to give the same



name to that intellectual capacity and knowledge without which a man could not will *either* right or wrong, and to that external and internal influence which inclines him to will one way *rather* than another. They object, especially, to the practice of applying the term ability to obedience itself, and inability to disobedience; confounding, in their view, the effect with its cause.

The great objection to the use of the terms moral and natural inability in *contrast* with each other is, that an impression is made



arises from nature as truly as other events." It is much to be regretted that some less ambiguous terms have not been employed to mark the distinction between the two kinds of inability.

Some part of the obscurity attending the consideration of this subject, appears to be owing to the fact that the inability of *doing* right, and the inability of *willing* right, are comprised in the same definition. While, in some respects, they are alike, in others they are different. The moral inability of *doing* right lies

in the want of right acts of will. This is sin. That which prevents the acts of the will itself from being right, *may be*, in some instances, the nature of its preceding acts. But this cannot always be the case. A man's *first* volitions cannot be prevented from being right by preceding volitions of his.

The controversies which have long agitated the Christian church on the subject of ability and inability, have, in many cases, undoubtedly, been owing to a radical difference of opinion

between the contending parties. But in other instances, those who appear to be nearly agreed in their doctrinal views, differ widely from each other in their interpretation of the leading terms employed in the discussion. The principal difference is in their giving a *broader* or more *limited* meaning to the words ability, inability, &c. One party contend, that a man has *no* ability for a required duty, unless he has *full* ability; unless he has *all* that upon which the result depends ; unless he

has the *inclination* to obey, as well as the requisite faculties. They admit of no division of ability into separate parts. They apply the term exclusively to the antecedents of the required act, *taken collectively*. Others think it expedient to speak of inability under separate heads; to distinguish the two divisions by calling one natural and the other moral. A third class *confine* the term to what Edwards calls natural inability. Some of these may believe in the reality of what he denominates moral



and inconsistent with obligation. In the language of some, a sinner has *no ability* to do his duty. According to others, he has *no inability*. And according to others still, he has *natural* ability, but *no moral* ability.

There is not only this confusion of signification, in the use of the terms ability, inability, &c. by different writers; but not unfrequently the *same* author substitutes the limited for the extended meaning, and natural for moral inability; and with these pliant materials,



dextrously constructs many a specious argument, which is indebted to this interchange of ambiguities for all its plausibility and power of deceiving. He starts, perhaps, with a position which none will question, that what Edwards calls natural inability, is inconsistent with obligation; and after occupying the attention of his readers with his circuitous logic till they have forgotten his premises, he comes out with his unqualified conclusion that *all* inability is inconsistent with

obligation. In the opportunity furnished for such fallacious argumentation, lies the danger to the cause of sound theological doctrine, from discussions in which these phrases are introduced.

## **SCRIPTURAL USAGE.**

Though there are serious evils resulting from the frequent and unguarded use of the expressions which we have now been considering; yet we cannot be justified in passing a





their want of *inclination*, or their having a contrary inclination; their want of sufficient *motives*, or the strength of motives to the contrary; the very conditions by which Edwards defines moral inability. Jer. 6:10: “They *cannot* hearken ; the word of the Lord is a reproach unto them ; they have no delight in it.” Gen. 37:4 : Joseph’s “brethren hated him, and *could not* speak peaceably to him.” Did it require any more *natural* ability to speak kindly than to speak roughly to their brother ? John 8:43 : “Ye



hear it he will kill me.” Luke 17:1: “It is *impossible* but that offenses will come; but woe unto him through whom they come.” If it be said that the last passage merely expresses the *certainty* that offenses will come, it declares, at least, the *impossibility* of the *contrary*. 1 John 3:9: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he *cannot* sin, because he is born of God.”

It ought to be observed, that in the various instances in which these terms are used in the

scriptures to express inability, they are so guarded and qualified, by the occasions on which they are introduced, and by their connection with other parts of the passages in which they are found, that an attentive and unprejudiced reader is in little or no danger of misapprehending their import. If theological metaphysicians would always provide as effectually against a wrong interpretation of their language, there would be less reason than there now is, for suggesting cautions



against the erroneous construction to which a similar application of these and such like expressions are liable.

The scriptural practice of employing the term *cannot*, or other words of equivalent import, to express aversion, a want of inclination, unwillingness, &c. is in conformity with frequent usage, in the language of *common life*. President Dwight, in his discourse on “man’s inability to obey the law of God,” observes; “The words *can* and *cannot* are used in the scriptures, just as they



occasion, utter it more naturally, than any other language. If the scriptures would be intelligible to the great body of mankind, they must speak in the same manner. In this manner, therefore, God has directed them to be written." There are few men who have had better opportunities than President Dwight, of observing the use of language, "in the common intercourse of mankind," or who have availed themselves of these opportunities to better purpose. Whatever may be



## SECTION 5: LIBERTY AND MORAL AGENCY.

*External liberty — It is opposed to compulsion, and to restraint — Internal liberty, or liberty of the will — Willing as we please — Independent liberty — Liberty of indifference — Contingent liberty — Moral agency.*

ON the subject of *liberty* or *freedom*, which occupies a portion of the fifth section of Edwards's first book, he has been less particular than was to be

expected, considering that this is the great object of inquiry in his work. His explanation of what he regards as the proper meaning of the term, is applicable to the liberty of *outward actions* ; to what is called by philosophers *external* liberty. “The plain and obvious meaning of the words freedom and liberty, in common speech,” he observes, “is power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has, *to do as he pleases*. Or, in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment, in the way of doing, or















depend on a previous volition. The definition, therefore, that liberty consists in doing as we will, is not *universally* applicable to volitions themselves. It ought to be observed, however, that in putting forth that class of acts which Edwards's opponents, as well as others, most commonly call volitions, viz. *imperative* acts, we truly will as we please, that is, in conformity with our affections and desires.

“One thing more I would observe,” says Edwards, “concerning what is

















## SECTION 6: SELF- DETERMINING POWER OF THE WILL.

*Subject of discussion — Why does a man will one way rather than another? — It is the agent himself that wills — Volitions are not produced by external motives alone — Edwards's Inquiry relates to the actions of accountable beings — Perversion of his work by Infidels — Reason of its extent — Do his definitions correspond with facts? — Self-determining power of*





particular volitions depend,  
can be traced back beyond  
the agent himself. It is an  
inquiry concerning  
*freedom of the will.*  
Freedom is an exemption  
from *something*. Is it an  
exemption from  
*everything*; especially from  
all *directing* influence from  
*without* the will of the  
agent ? The question is not,  
whether he is dependent  
for the *faculty* of willing,  
without which he could not  
will at all. This, it is  
admitted by both parties,  
has been given by the  
Creator. Nor is it the point  
of inquiry, whether he is



dependent upon anything without himself, for willing respecting particular objects. He can neither choose nor refuse a thing of which he has no knowledge. But the real question to be determined is, why a man wills *one way rather than another* ; why he puts forth *such* volitions as he does; why he prefers the service of God to the pursuits of ambition and avarice ; why one man chooses what another refuses. The object of our inquiry is not to ascertain, whether it is *the agent himself* that wills, or



in other words, whether the kind of volition depends on the agent *alone*.

The discussion relates to the actions of *accountable* beings. Edwards's work is entitled an Inquiry respecting that freedom of will which is supposed to be essential to *moral agency*, virtue and vice, reward and punishment, praise and blame. It has sometimes been thought, that he has labored hard to maintain the *dependence* of volitions, at the expense of *accountability*. The truth is, it is the great object of his work to shew,



portions of his work. The subject of independent freedom of will occupies the second part. The consistency of dependence with accountability is largely discussed, in the two following parts. Is there not reason to believe, that some form their opinions of the whole work, from reading the former portion only? Has not this partial examination suggested doubts and objections, which an attentive perusal of the sequel might have effectually obviated ?

In the unwarrantable

separation of these two parts of the Inquiry, each of which is essential to a right understanding of the other, is to be found the secret of the perversion of the work, by some sceptical philosophers. They make a shew of accompanying the author through the first half of his book ; but there they take their leave of him, and walk hand in hand with his opponents. They form to themselves a welcome, but ruinous combination of the Calvinistic doctrine of dependence with the Arminian tenet that







resorted to by the same writer. This is one reason of the numerous, and almost unavoidable *repetitions* which occur in different parts of the work.

In his first book, he has given *definitions* of moral agency, liberty, necessity, &c. corresponding with his own opinions ; and other definitions, agreeing with the views of his opponents. In the second part, his object is to determine, which of these classes of definitions accords with *fact*; with the nature and reality of things. This is a point of high importance,

in all discussions relating to the properties, powers, and actions, of beings and things which have real existence. It is so easy to form definitions, that if they could be admitted to take the place of argument, the management of controversies might be reduced within very narrow limits. In the pure mathematics, where the very foundations of the science are suppositions, these, expressed in the form of definitions, are sufficient to form the basis on which the whole superstructure is reared.

There is no occasion to inquire whether they correspond with facts, till we come to make use of the results of our reasoning, in their practical applications. But in physical and mental philosophy, in moral and theological investigations, it is all important, that the models of our definitions be taken, as nearly as possible, from the realities of nature and life.

The writers to whom Edwards has undertaken to reply, have given *their* definitions of freedom ; and some of them seem to suppose, that these will be







accountable for an act of choice, unless it has proceeded from *antecedent* choice; unless we have *chosen to choose* as we do. This mode of explaining the freedom of the will, may be quite satisfactory to those from whose vision a difficulty is effectually withdrawn, if it be removed only *one step* out of the way. But Edwards had a propensity to look a little farther into consequences. He was for following out a train of deductions, till he could see where it would lead him. If one free act of will is necessary, to render

a consequent one free, to what, he would ask, did the *former* owe its freedom ? To another preceding that, which was also made free, by another still farther back in the series ? “If the will,” he observes, “which we find governs the members of the body, and determines and commands their motions and actions, does also govern itself, and determine its own motions and acts, it doubtless determines them the same way, even by *antecedent volitions*. The will determines which way the hands and feet shall move,





















determined by another. He considers the *affections* as acts of the will; and these have an influence, in giving direction to our purposes and executive volitions. But he denies that *every* volition is determined by a preceding one; that the *first* in a series is dependent on another before it. In his view, freedom of the *will* is not, in *every respect*, the same as the freedom of external actions.

The argument of President Edwards, to shew that every volition cannot be determined by a



*evading* the foregoing reasoning.”

The first evasion which he notices is this; “That the faculty or *power* of will, or the soul in the use of that power, determines its own volitions ; and that it does it, *without any act going before* the act determined.” This he considers so “full of the most gross absurdity,” that he doubts whether he should not “wrong the Arminians, in supposing that any of them would make use of it.” Absurd as it may seem, this is, perhaps, at the present day, the most popular form of















volitions, and puts them into his mind. Motives do not cause his acts of choice without his agency. The exercise of the will is so essential to volition, that, according to Edwards, it is the very thing in which volition consists. He does not, like some others, abstract the *act* of choice from the agency of the will.

The answer of Edwards's opponents, to the question, What determines the will, is evasive in another respect. It must be admitted, that the *power* of willing does precede every act of the will; and that it is

so far a cause, that *without* this power, no act of will could be put forth. It is *causa sine qua non*. But the mere power of willing can be properly assigned, as a reason for nothing more than the fact, that the man wills, or may will, in some way or other. It has nothing to do with giving a particular *direction* to volition. Whereas the real point of inquiry is, Why do we will *one way rather than another* ? A man's power to walk in *every* direction, does not determine which way he will actually walk. An equal



## SECTION 7: CAUSE OF VOLITION.

*Every change must have a cause answerable to the effect — Argument for the being of a God — Reasoning analogically from material to mental phenomena — In what sense, is a man the cause of his own volitions? — Does anything give direction to our acts of choice? — Or does volition determine itself? — Is there a necessary cause of choice? — Contingent cause of volition — It is the nature*

of choice to make a selection — Are the acts of the will accounted for in itself alone? — Volition called an ultimate fact — Appeal to consciousness — Edwards's own experience — What points does he take for granted? — Intuitive truths — Can a self-evident truth be demonstrated? — Does the nature of a cause determine the nature of its effects? — Theory of Doctor Watts — Are the diversities of choice owing to different states of the mind? — The opponents of Edwards have occasion for







volition is determined to be as it is, *by the act itself*, by merely taking place : that its being one way rather than the opposite, is not owing to the directing influence of any preceding cause : that if the agent himself may be said to determine the act, it is only by putting it forth : that in coming to a choice, he causes himself to choose as he does.

This brings us to the second branch of Edwards's inquiry concerning the determination of the will, to the question, "Whether



















pass without a cause, we should not only have no proof of the being of God; but we should be without evidence of the existence of anything whatsoever, but our own immediately present ideas and consciousness. For we have no way to prove anything else, but by arguing from effects to causes."

The relation of cause and effect is, according to Edwards, as applicable to *volitions*, as to any other change. "It is indeed as repugnant to reason to suppose, that an *act of the will* should come into

existence without a cause, as to suppose the human soul, or an angel, or the globe of the earth, or the whole universe, should come into existence without a cause.”

The opinion that every volition must have an adequate cause, is sometimes ascribed to our reasoning analogically from the phenomena of the *material* world. It is said, that we are accustomed to observe the regular succession of causes and effects in the physical changes around us; and that, without sufficient



























something; every inclination of the will must be a particular inclination. But the real point of inquiry is, Why is there *this* particular inclination, rather than *some other* particular inclination ? Is a man's choosing a given object, the reason why he chooses that, rather than something else ? It is the very nature of *motion*, to take some particular direction. Does it follow, that the moving body *gives* this direction to its own motion? To the inquiry, why a particular body moves to the east, rather











science, that volition is an *ultimate* fact; and therefore, that it neither requires, nor admits of explanation. But by an ultimate fact, in experimental philosophy, is not meant a fact *without a cause*. It is a phenomenon the particular cause of which *has not been discovered*. That it has *some* antecedent cause, is as certain, as that anything else has a cause. So an ultimate fact in *mental* philosophy, is one which we are not able to explain by pointing out its immediate cause. This is



us to will as we do ? Are we conscious, that our volitions spring into existence, without being affected by any cause prior to our agency in putting them forth ? The fact that a man wills in a particular way, is to be accounted for. Is he conscious, that there is no cause of this fact; no cause why he wills as he does, rather than otherwise ? Is he conscious, that no temptation, argument, persuasion, or influence, has had anything to do in bringing him to the decisions which he makes? "One has as good a right,"









myself my own being, or that I came into being accidentally, without a cause, because I first found myself possessed of being, before I had knowledge of a cause of my being.”  
[*Freedom of the Will, Part IV, Sec. 13, note.*]

Edwards has sometimes been charged with *taking things for granted*, in his book. The points which he assumes as already admitted are of two classes. In the first place, he takes it for granted, that he knows *his own meaning* of the principal terms which occur in his work, and that



always determined by the strongest motive.” The reasoning in support of this opinion is not presented in that place, but in the argumentative part of the work. Is an advocate at the bar charged with taking things for granted, when, in the opening statement of a cause, he lays down propositions which he expects to be able to prove, in the course of the trial ?

But secondly, Edwards does take for granted such elementary truths as, by common consent, are admitted to be *intuitive*. This must be done by every



speaking, a position is not to be received into the rank of intuitive truths, unless it be so considered by the common consent of mankind. Things may *appear* to be self-evident to one man, which are not so to others. But there are many truths which are acknowledged by all, as soon as the terms in which they are expressed are understood. These are the proper materials to be employed as elements of reasoning, in controversial discussions.

Principles assumed, are not unfrequently styled

intuitive truths, as an apology for not attempting to sustain them by argument. It is supposed that they are of a nature so peculiar, as not to admit of being proved. This is true in one sense only. If they are perfectly self-evident, they cannot be rendered *more* evident by reasoning. But their truth, in some cases at least, may be deduced as a consequence from premises. A proposition which has been *demonstrated* cannot be afterwards proved, in the sense of being made more evident; for in



demonstration there are no degrees. But a truth which is already fully established, may also be sustained by various courses of argument. This is the case, even with intuitive truths. Edwards, therefore, though he advances certain principles as self-evident, yet consents to make them the subject of discussion.

One of the points which he takes for granted as intuitive, is the axiom, “that nothing ever comes to pass *without a cause*.” This he considers “the first dictate of the common and natural sense which God





willing agent do not, it is said, determine what his choice will be. They cause that there shall be volitions, of some kind or other ; but do not decide *what* they shall be; whether right or wrong; whether in favor of a particular object, or against it. This is like supposing a cause which should set a body *in motion*, without moving it in any one direction. If it be admitted, that a man gives a particular determination to his choice ; yet it is claimed, that he does this, only by the *act* of choosing;

which is saying, in different words, that the choice determines itself; for the man's choosing is his choice.

In the fourth section of Edwards's Part II, he remarks upon the position of Dr. Watts, that as "spirits are of an *active* nature, the spring of action is within themselves, and they can *determine themselves*." This supposition admits that volitions have a cause, in the active nature of the mind; but assigns no sufficient reason why a man wills *one way* rather











of *what kind* they shall be.

If it be said, that the different *states* of different minds, or of the same mind at different times, will account for all the variety in the acts of will, the inquiry returns upon us, To what are we to ascribe these different states? Are *they* without a cause? One man is avaricious, another is prodigal; one is benevolent, another is malicious; the same man is, at one time, rejoicing, at another, in affliction. Are all the changes in the mind to be accounted for, by its activity alone? If each

particular state of the soul has its antecedent cause, then we may trace back the series, till we come to the *first one* within the mind. This must either have *no* cause, or a cause *without* the mind. “Therefore,” says our author, “the activity of the nature of the soul affords no relief from the difficulties which the notion of a self-determining power in the will is attended with; nor will it help, in the least, its absurdities and inconsistencies.”

The opponents of Edwards consider it

essential to accountable agency, that a man's volitions should be free from all determining influence from *without the will*. They must therefore be determined by the *will itself*, or by *nothing at all*. Of each part of this alternative, he has given a separate examination. But he proceeds to observe, in Section 5, that the advocates of a self-determining power in the will, are not commonly satisfied with taking their *choice* of these two positions. They find they have occasion for *both* of







it be admitted that he *does* determine them, he must do it, either by the volitions themselves, or by *previous acts* of some kind, such as perceptions, emotions, affections, &c., or by some *state*, or propensity, or habit of the mind; or by its very *nature* and original constitution. But none of these have their origin in chance. They are dependent, either immediately or remotely, upon something *without* the mind. Some, perhaps, may admit a series of antecedents, on which the particular direction of



volition depends, provided the whole of this series is *within* the mind of the agent. But this is only another mode of making volition proceed originally from nothing. For if the links of the chain be traced back to their commencement, the *first one* can, by the supposition, depend upon no antecedent, either within or without the mind. The whole series, therefore, must have its origin in nothing.

It must be acknowledged, however, that in the present unsettled state of



his assertion that Arminian writers are *obliged* to talk inconsistently, he places before us a number of quotations which Dr. Whitby had made from Origen and others, implying that liberty consists in *our doing what we will*; in doing good or evil, *according to our own free choice*. The meaning of this, as Edwards observes, must be either, 1. That liberty consists in having *our external conduct* depend on our choice ; or 2. That our acts of *will* are acts "*proceeding* from our own free choice that is,

dependent on *prior* acts; or  
3. That our volitions are  
*really* volitions; that they  
are our own free choice.  
The last of these  
suppositions is the  
identical proposition, that  
whatever is, is. The first, if  
it be *confined* to external  
conduct, is according to  
Edwards, the very doctrine  
which Dr. Whitby professes  
to oppose, as agreeing with  
the opinion of Mr. Hobbes.  
The inference then is, that  
when Dr. Whitby places the  
liberty of the *will* in a  
man's *willing what he*  
*wills*, his meaning must be,  
“That a man has power to





















itself. There must be no dependence which reaches back to anything without. If it be admitted, that there may be several successive acts, one determining another, they must all be acts of *will*. The series must not originate in any agency or influence from without.

Some may perhaps ask, does President Edwards really believe in any freedom of *will*? Is not his notion of liberty confined to the relation between acts of choice and *external conduct*? "I find," he observes, "that some are







*please. External* liberty, according to Edwards, is *doing* as we will; and *internal* liberty is *willing and choosing* as we please ; according to “our own inclinations and passions.” In other words, our imperative volitions correspond with the state and affections of our hearts. He does not admit, that we can “rise higher” in our notions of liberty, by representing *every* volition as proceeding from a *prior* volition. This, if it is rising at all, is mounting to the region of direct contradiction. Nor does he



certain dependence upon preceding feelings, they may as frequently happen to be in *opposition* to our strongest desires, as in conformity with them. That which a man abhors more than anything else, may *chance* to be the object of his choice.

There is reason to think, that with respect to the cause of volition, President Edwards and his opponents, some of them at least, misapprehend each other's meaning. By the cause of an act of choice, he understands something *antecedent* to









## SECTION 8: LIBERTY OF INDIFFERENCE. POWER OF CONTRARY CHOICE.

*Choice of objects between which there is no sensible difference — Indifference in the will itself — Power of contrary choice — Limited and extended meaning of the word power — Power of moving in opposite directions — Faculty of willing — The influence which gives direction to choice — Illogical use of the ambiguous term power — Intuitive conviction that we could have chosen*









which of two barley corns to take, does it follow, that he will be indifferent whether to accept of a guinea or a farthing; whether to possess an estate or a trinket ?

Though the question concerning the choosing between *things* which are indifferent, may be one of little importance; this is far from being the case with the next subject of our inquiry, Whether indifference in *the will itself* is essential to liberty. In the seventh section, Edwards examines “the opinion of such as place

liberty in indifference, or in that equilibrium whereby the will is without all antecedent determination or bias, and left hitherto free from any prepossessing inclination to one side or the other ; that so the determination of the will to either side may be entirely from itself, and that it may be owing only to its own power, and that sovereignty which it has over itself, that it goes this way rather than that.” Before entering on the argument in relation to this point, he remarks upon a certain distinction which is

made by some, between the indifference of the *inclination* or *tendency* of the will, and its *power* or *ability to go either way indifferently*. This he considers a newly invented distinction, and “a *refining* only of some particular writers.”

The difficulty and perplexity arising from this mysterious *power to the contrary*, there is reason to think, is not owing, as Edwards supposes, to distinctions which are too refined; but either to the *want* of accurate distinctions respecting it,

or to our not adhering to them when made. The embarrassment which so frequently attends the subject, proceeds from our confounding the *limited* with the *extended* signification of the word power ; substituting one of the meanings for the other, and this perhaps, without being ourselves aware of the change. In willing, as in the case of many other free actions, there must be a faculty of *turning in opposite directions*, of “going either way indifferently.” This is *one* element of the will, but not









must have the other requisite of walking, a *directing* power over his limbs. It is the command which his mind has over his body, that determines whether he shall go east or west. The simple power of motion in the limbs gives no *direction* to their motion. This depends on the directing power of our minds. A man may be fully resolved to walk in one way only, at a particular time, when, so far as the structure of his limbs is concerned, he may have equal power to walk in any one of a thousand different

ways. An actual choice can be in one direction only. It cannot be, at one and the same time, equally inclined to opposite sides. As there cannot be *motion in the abstract*, motion which has no definite direction ; so there can be no *general abstract volition* ; a choice where nothing particular is chosen.

This example of power to the contrary is taken, for the purpose of illustration, from a case of *external liberty*, the freedom of bodily action. Is the distinction which has been made, applicable to











forbearing to act,) and an indifferency as to *inclination*, (that is, an equal approbation or liking of one thing or of the contrary,) *is one and the same thing ?*" [*Reply to Collins, p. 12.*] In one of these senses, using power as synonymous with faculty, a man has the power of contrary choice. But the proposition is not true, when either of the other two significations is given to the term. A man is not always under equal *influence* to opposite volitions. Nor has he equal power in contrary

directions, if the word power be used to include both faculty *and* influence. It may be said, perhaps, that this is an improper use of the term power. However improper it may be, it is not so very uncommon. Nor is the philological impropriety the greatest evil attending the practice. It is the logical, or rather, the illogical use of the word power, that does the mischief. The position is taken, that man has the power, that is, the faculty of having contrary volitions. From this, the

conclusion is drawn, that the power of willing is the *sole* cause, why the mind wills one way rather than another. The latter proposition is true, only on the supposition that the term power is here used with a meaning very different from that given it in the preceding sentence. The power of willing, in the restricted sense in which the word is used in the premises, has no more to do with giving any particular direction to the act of choice, than the twinkling of the stars. This office belongs to a power

entirely different; as much so, as the beam of a balance is distinct from the weight which causes one end to preponderate. And yet, from the simple fact, that man has a faculty of willing, which of itself gives no direction to volition, how often is the conclusion drawn, that neither that nor anything else can give direction to the will. The sophistry consists in using the same word in a *limited* sense in the premises, and with a broader signification in the conclusion. By such a mode of reasoning, the most contradictory







here made, between the faculty of willing, and the influence which gives direction to particular acts of choice ; as they sometimes use language apparently expressing the opinion that there *is nothing* antecedent to a volition which determines it to be one way rather than another. This seems to be implied in what they say respecting liberty of indifference, equal liberty to either side, &c. If they would *adhere* to this position, if they would come out decidedly and consistently in favor of



























## SECTION 9: LIBERTY WITHOUT NECESSITY. DICTATES OF THE UNDERSTANDING.

*Indifference in the faculty of willing — The sophistry which depends on the ambiguity of the term necessity — Contingent volition — Are volitions certainly connected with any preceding cause? — Does anything render them certain? — Will the same volitions always follow from the same causes, in the same circumstances? — Dictates*





*necessity*—to all which is *called* necessity, he might, with more propriety have said. According to his *own* representation, liberty is inconsistent with all that is *properly* called necessity. There is reason to think, that to the cause which he has, in so masterly a manner, defended he has yet done injury, by making too liberal concessions to his opponents, with respect to their use of this term. It is to them a storehouse of ambiguities; a well-furnished armory of double-edged weapons. And they are so easily

managed, that they can do execution, even in the hands of very ordinary combatants. The logical process which depends on the use of this term is so simple, that the most inexperienced reasoner may soon learn to give it effect. It consists in first taking for granted, what no one will deny, that necessity, in the *common and proper* acceptation of the term, is inconsistent with liberty ; and afterwards assigning to the word *any meaning whatever* which your purpose may require. You



have then nothing more to do, but to draw your conclusion, that *all* necessity, in *every* sense of the term, is inconsistent with liberty. It may call for some little artifice of circumlocution, to prevent your readers from noticing the change of meaning which you have introduced. But there is no difficulty in this. The reason why *common* necessity is inconsistent with liberty is, that it is, or may be, *opposed to the will*. This opposition is so thoroughly inwrought into our common notions of

necessity, that however the meaning may be modified in other respects, most readers will take it for granted that this, which they are accustomed to consider as the *essential* element in all necessity, is *included* in any new signification which is given to the term.

Edwards could not do justice to the investigation of his subject, without introducing the word necessity into his book, with the various significations given it by his opponents, for the purpose of examining their

arguments, the validity or fallacy of which depends, in many cases, upon these significations. But he might have protested, instill stronger language than he has done, against the numerous impositions practiced, by the changes rung upon this flexible term. Notwithstanding the precautions which he has taken, to guard against a wrong construction of this ill-chosen word, is it certain, that his own meaning is never misapprehended?

He proceeds, in the eighth section to inquire,





future volitions are *certain*,  
*but not necessary*;  
meaning that although it be  
certain that they will take  
place, yet they are not  
certainly *connected* with  
any preceding cause. If  
there can be any future  
events which are, in the  
absolute sense, contingent,  
entirely independent of any  
cause whatever, yet they  
are, in one sense, certain; *if*  
they are to happen, they  
will certainly happen; in  
other words, whatever will  
be, will be. In this way,  
some writers contrive to  
apply the term certain to  
events which they suppose

to be altogether loose from any previous determining influence. If it be admitted, that they are connected with *anything* preceding, it is only with foreknowledge ; and this has no concern in bringing them to pass. There is nothing which *renders* them certain. They are certain, only because they will certainly *happen* to take place. But Edwards endeavors to shew, that volitions are *rendered* certain by their causes. This is what he calls a *necessity of consequence*, or an *infallible connection*. He had previously shewn,





influence of a cause, is the very notion of an effect. If there be no such relation between one thing and another, consisting in the connection and dependence of one thing on the influence of another, then it is certain there is no such relation between them, as is signified by the terms cause and effect.”

The infallible connection between effects and their causes implies, that the same effects will *always* follow from the same causes, in the same circumstances. If any event “might have followed or

might not, when the cause was the same, its influence the same, and under the same circumstances,—*why* did it follow, rather than not follow? There is no cause or reason of this. Therefore here is something, without any cause or reason why it is.—To suppose there are some events which have a cause and ground of their existence, that yet are not necessarily,” that is, certainly “connected with their cause, is to suppose that they have a cause which is *not* their cause.” It implies, “that the influence



## DICTATES OF THE UNDERSTANDING.

In his ninth section, Edwards treats of the connection of the acts of the will with the *dictates of the understanding*. The principal difficulty here arises from the disagreement among metaphysicians, in classifying the powers of the mind ; in determining where the line is to be drawn, between the understanding and the will. According to some writers, it is the particular province

of the understanding to distinguish between *truth and error*. According to others, it includes the power of deciding between *right and wrongs* the office of conscience. Others again extend it so far, as to bring within its scope the perception of what is *agreeable or disagreeable* ; of what Edwards calls the greatest apparent good. The feelings which he denominates affections, and which he considers as belonging to the will, some would refer to the understanding, while others would assign them a

place under a third faculty, distinct from the understanding, and from the will also.

When the inquiry is made, whether volition always follows *the last dictate of the understanding*, it is important to know whether by this expression is meant a decision of the intellect merely, or a dictate of *conscience*, or an impulse of predominant *feeling*. That the will is not always moved by the intellect alone, without any influence from conscience or emotion, will probably





















## SECTION 10: INFLUENCE OF MOTIVES.

*External and internal motives — Are motives the causes of acts of choice? — It is the mind that wills — Are motives mere objects of choice? — Mr. Chubb's scheme of liberty — Does the mind of the agent determine whether motives shall have any efficacy or not? — Does the strongest motive always prevail? — The same outward objects, acting as motives, have not invariably the same*



*relative strength —  
Meaning of tendency —  
There is no particular kind  
of motive which is  
invariably the strongest —  
The term motive is not  
confined to specific desires  
— Is it by reasoning in a  
circle, that we come to the  
conclusion, that the  
strongest motive will  
prevail? — Is the strength  
of a motive measured by  
the results to which it leads  
— The vividness of our  
emotions measured by  
consciousness — What can  
induce a man to will in  
opposition to the strongest  
motive? — Does the agent*











motive *may* be an act of the will itself. *Being pleased* with an object is an affection of the mind; and he considers the affections as belonging to the will. He is far from supposing, however, that a volition can be a *motive to itself*. The motive to a particular act is always *antecedent* to the act. But a volition *of one kind* may be a motive to a volition of another kind. An affection may be a motive to an imperative act.

Motives, says Edwards, are the *causes* of acts of the will. But this assertion is to be understood with some















before us, is not peculiar to Mr. Chubb. It is popular with many who have never, perhaps, heard of him as its advocate. It is substantially this; There must be motives to excite, induce, or dispose the mind to action. Without these, it cannot will at all. But they must have permission from the mind itself, before they can throw upon it any effectual influence. It is the mind that determines, whether they shall have any efficacy or not; and that gives to different motives their comparative strength.







## THE STRONGEST MOTIVE.

One of the most important subjects for consideration, in this tenth section, is the question, whether the *strongest motive* always *prevails*. What Edwards means by the strongest motive, is that which has the greatest *tendency* to prevail; which has this tendency *previous* to the volition that actually takes place. That which has "the greatest degree of *previous tendency* to excite and induce to choice, is what I call the strongest

motive. And in *this* sense, I suppose the will is always determined by the strongest motive.” The definition implies so much as this, that motives *have* a tendency to move the will, and that they have this tendency in *different degrees*. If men were perfectly indifferent to all motives, if none had any influence over the will, or if their power to excite volition were, in all cases perfectly the same; then Edwards’s definition would have no application to *our* world, however well it might be adapted to other









*I, Sec. 2.]* As different things may have opposite tendencies, one of these may overpower the other. A cause which has a tendency to produce a particular effect, will actually produce it, unless it is prevented by some cause which has a different tendency. The gravitation of the earth has a tendency to give a level surface to the waters of the ocean. If they were left to this influence alone, they would be actually and uniformly level. But the attraction of the moon, and the force of the winds, have a contrary

tendency. The consequence is, that the ocean is never perfectly level, in every part of its surface. A stone has a tendency to fall toward the earth. This implies, not that it is always actually falling; but that it invariably falls, when not obstructed, or under the influence of some opposing force. Even when thrown directly upwards, it still retains its downward tendency, which at first retards, and soon destroys, its upward motion.

A *motive* has a tendency to excite the mind to a particular volition, when









does not hold, that desires, emotions, passions, &c. which are designated by particular names, have invariably the same relative strength; the same degree of influence over imperative volitions. They cannot be classified and marked, like the weights belonging to the scales on a merchant's counter; so that, comparing any two, it can be said, that this has always greater efficacy than the other. Ambition is not invariably stronger than avarice. The love of power has not always greater influence in determining

the will, than animal gratification. The passions may be violent in one man, and languid in another. In one, the love of gain may be the controlling spring of action, in another, a thirst for knowledge.

Even in the *same* individual, one class of desires may be strongest at one time, and a different class, at another time. The passions are variously excited, by an almost endless diversity of circumstances. At one time, a man may be ready to sacrifice his prospects for life, by yielding to present

gratification. At another time, his regard for his future interests may be so strong, as to restrain him from ruinous indulgences. At one period of life, he may be so engrossed with the pursuits of the present world, as to be regardless of his everlasting welfare. At another, his attention may be so roused to the salvation of his soul, as to withdraw his thoughts and feelings from earthly concerns. There is no *particular kind* of motive, which is entitled to be called the strongest, as being the invariable



object. The general desire of future good, and a regard for the welfare of others, or the interests of the divine kingdom, if they have any influence in giving direction to volition, are included in his definition of motive. These may be *less variable* than specific desires. Still it does not follow, that they are always stronger, or always weaker than specific desires. Even if the general desire were *perfectly* uniform, the specific desires, being variable, might sometimes be stronger, and sometimes



weaker than the other. The power of gravity, at a particular place on the earth, is always the same. Yet the attractive force of a magnet may, at one time, be insufficient, and at another time, more than sufficient, to raise a given weight from the ground in opposition to its gravitating power.

Does the strongest motive always *prevail* ? If several motives are presented to the mind at the same time, one of these may be stronger than either of the others taken separately, but weaker than a number







way rather than another; when different motives are before the mind at the same time, whether one has more influence than another, in giving a particular direction to choice ; whether there is any *difference* in the strength of motives; whether one has a *greater tendency* to move the will than another; whether one, by its influence, ever *prevails* over another. These are points to be determined, not by definition, but by our own consciousness, and observation of the conduct



a cause, by the effects which it produces. Yet the strength of the cause is not in the effect, but in the cause itself. In many cases, we learn even the *existence* of a cause, from the effects only. Who knows anything of gravitation as a cause, but from the effects which are observed? Yet this does not identify the effects with the efficacy of the cause. The strength of a *motive* is not its prevailing, but the *power* by which it prevails. Yet we may very properly *measure* this power by the actual result. We measure the strength of a charge of

powder, by the momentum which it gives to a ball. But the strength of the powder does not *consist* in the motion of the ball. It is the power by which the motion is produced. It is the degree of *tendency* in the powder towards such an effect. We learn the weight of gold compared with cork, by the motion which it gives to a balance. Yet this motion is not the weight itself, but the effect of it. The gold was heavy, *before* it was placed in the balance. The strength of a motive exists, before it moves the will.

We may measure the







not what Edwards means by the *strength* of a motive. It is admitted, that what we sometimes consider our more lively emotions, calling for present indulgence, have frequently less tendency to determine particular acts of will, than a firm and steady regard for our future welfare. But this only proves, that the strength of motives is not always proportioned to the apparent *vividness* of our feelings. The tendency of a motive to give a particular direction to choice, does by no means depend on our ability to *measure* this













implies, that one motive has no more influence than another? in other words, that they have no influence at all, in giving direction to choice. We are all agreed, that it is the agent that wills, and not the motive. But does anything *induce* him to will one way rather than another? If not, the direction which his volitions take, must be a matter of absolute contingency; unless the very *nature* of the soul is subject to all the changes which we find, in the determinations of the will.

It may be said, that He



























itself, or in that which is agreeable, or in that which is reasonable, or in something else. Is the will so constituted by nature, that independently of any inducement, without itself, it tends to go in one direction rather than another ? Is the diversity of its volitions to be ascribed to *changes* to which it is subject ? If so, do these changes take place without any cause ? Is the will, while impartial and indifferent in itself, *induced* to make a particular choice, either by that which is agreeable, or







nor argument, neither natural propensities nor education, neither promises nor threatenings, neither conscience nor law, neither human nor divine government, neither the dread of poverty and disgrace, nor the allurements of office, and distinction, and opulence, neither considerations of compassion, of benevolence, of justice, or of patriotism ; neither the word nor the Spirit of God, neither the mercies and judgments of the present life, nor the retributions of that which is to come, can



## SECTION 11: DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF VOLITIONS.

*The scriptures contain numerous predictions of the moral actions of men, and of events depending on these actions — The immutability of God implies a perfect knowledge of all future events — Has Edwards blended scriptural authority with abstract reasoning? — Are suppositions the foundation of all pure science? — Practical*





















If He cannot *foreknow* the voluntary acts of moral agents, He cannot *foretell* them ; that is, He cannot peremptorily and certainly foretell them.—Positively to foretell, is to profess to foreknow, or to declare positive foreknowledge.”

“If God does not certainly foreknow the future volitions of moral agents, then neither can He certainly foreknow those *events* which are consequent and dependent on these volitions. The existence of the one depending on the existence of the other, the *knowledge*

of the existence of the one depends on the knowledge of the existence of the other; and the one cannot be more certain than the other. Therefore, how many, how great, and how extensive soever, the consequences of the volitions of moral agents may be; though they should extend to an alteration of the state of things through the universe, and should be continued, in a series of events, to all eternity; and should, in the progress of things, branch forth into an infinite number of series,



charged with blending the *authority of revelation*, with the abstractions of the “higher metaphysics.” [See *Isaac Taylor’s Essay on Abstract Reasoning*, pp. 21, 129, 154.] The latter, it is claimed, should be considered, like the pure mathematics, as a science by itself, having no dependence upon any other department of knowledge. A science strictly demonstrative, it is said, should contain all the elements of its composition within itself; deriving no part of its support from without. It should not even



be founded upon *facts* ; upon any of the realities of either the material or the mental world. It should be based upon *suppositions* only; and its structure should consist of nothing but demonstrations deriving certain conclusions from these suppositions. The whole science may be justly considered as hypothetical; the conclusions being true, as realities, only on the condition that the suppositions correspond with facts. This is the case with the pure mathematics. Facts are not admitted as

forming any part of the foundation or the superstructure. The whole science is built upon suppositions, commonly expressed in the form of definitions. The axioms come in as the cement which binds the parts together. Such, it is said, ought to be the character of every pure science. It should not be adulterated with an intermixture of facts. It should rise above the realities of life, and keep its place in the elevated region of hypothetical abstractions.

But if all this be true, as

ought, perhaps, to be admitted, what *practical* value, one may naturally enough inquire, can there be, in such visionary speculations ? Of what use can they be, except as forming a philosophical romance, to relieve the dullness of a vacant hour; or as a gymnastic exercise of the intellect, like a contest of skill on a chess-board, where unreal kings and queens, by their deep planned marches and countermarches, play their games of war and conquest? The proper answer to this inquiry is,

that the practical utility of these abstractions, consists in their *application* to facts, to the realities of matter and mind. It is this which renders mathematical science of such incalculable value, in the business and arts of real life. The demonstrations in Euclid are founded on *supposed* triangles, circles, squares, &c. But they are equally applicable to *real* triangles, circles, &c., wherever they may be found. A demonstration will stand as firmly on a *fact*, as on a *supposition*. The

imperfection in the application of pure geometry to practical concerns, is owing to the difficulty of determining with certainty, whether a real figure exactly coincides with the supposed one ; whether that which appears to be a circle, does not, in any part, differ, a hair's breadth from the *definition* of a circle.

The methods of obtaining the *evidence* of facts, are so different from the logical processes in abstract reasoning, that one of these departments of investigation, ought not to

be so blended with the other, as to prevent the distinction between them from being kept clearly in view. In giving elementary instruction, there may be an advantage in separating them entirely, till the learner has become familiar with the characteristic difference between them. But it by no means follows from this, that they are never to be brought together. The utility of each depends on the union of the two. Accordingly, in works on the physical sciences, and the practical arts,

mathematical reasoning is abundantly applied to facts ascertained by observation and experiment. The carpenter may find it convenient to prepare and adjust the timbers for an edifice, at a distance from the spot where the mason is laying the foundation. But when the building is to be erected for use, the frame-work and the masonry must be brought together.

*Metaphysical* investigation, as well as the pure mathematics, may be treated as a subject of mere speculation; founding all





given, in this part at least, any just ground for the charge of *blending* metaphysical reasoning with evidence derived from revelation, that he has, placed them in different sections. His purpose required, that a *fact* should be proved, the foreknowledge of God, and that, from this fact, a *conclusion* should be drawn, respecting the infallible certainty of volitions. In the eleventh section, the fact is established by scriptural authority. In the twelfth, the conclusion is obtained,









things signified by the subject and predicate of a proposition which affirms something to be true.” It may be the certainty either of the *existence* of that which is spoken of, or of its *connection* with something preceding. The latter is that which Edwards calls *consequential* necessity. *[Part I, Sec. 3 and 4.]*

In the section now under consideration, he takes *three different views* of the certainty, or as he calls it, the necessity of volitions.

In the **first place**, he undertakes to shew, that the future existence of the







necessary, are themselves necessary; as that proposition whose truth is necessarily connected with another proposition which is necessarily true, is itself necessarily true. To say otherwise, would be a contradiction. It would be in effect to say, that the connection was indissoluble, and yet was not so, but might be broken.—So that it is perfectly demonstrable, that if there be any infallible knowledge of future volitions, the event is *necessary*; or, in other words, that it is *impossible*



they are *rendered* certain, by antecedent causes, motives, &c. Of those who agree with him thus far, there are two classes; one of which supposes that God has a perfect knowledge of future volitions, by his seeing all the trains of antecedents on which they depend. The other class holds, that He foresees volitions as *contingent*, as not rendered certain by any preceding influence. These two opinions, he proceeds to consider separately, adopting the first as his own. He maintains,

**Secondly,** “That no













There was no evidence of it to be seen *in the thing itself*; for the thing itself, as yet, was not. And there was no evidence of it to be seen *in anything else*; for evidence in something else, is *connection with* something else, but such connection is contrary to the supposition. There was no evidence before, that this thing *would happen*; for by the supposition, there was no reason why it *should* happen, rather than something else, or rather than nothing.—The thing was absolutely without evidence, and absolutely

unknowable. An increase of *understanding*, or of the capacity of discerning, has no tendency, and makes no advance, to a discerning any signs or evidences of it, let it be increased ever so much; yea, if it be increased *infinitely*. The increase of the strength of *sight* may have a tendency to enable to discern the evidence which is far off, and very much hid, and deeply involved in clouds and darkness ; but it has no tendency to enable to discern evidence where there is none.—On the contrary, it has a tendency





When, therefore, President Edwards asserts, that if there be any evidence of a future contingent event, it must be either *self-evidence* or *proof* he explains himself to mean, that it must be either evident *in itself* or evident *in something else*. Self-evidence of such an event is the real and infallible futurity of the event itself.

**Thirdly;** in the remaining view which Edwards takes of the divine foreknowledge of human volitions, he admits, for argument's sake, the position of his opponents,











to be inconsistent with itself. For to say, that God certainly, and without all conjecture, knows that a thing will infallibly be, which, at the same time, he knows to be so contingent, that it may possibly not be, is to suppose his knowledge inconsistent with itself; or that one thing that He knows is utterly inconsistent with another thing that He knows. It is the same thing as to say, He now knows a proposition to be of certain, infallible truth, which He knows to be of contingent, uncertain







human liberty, on account of any *necessity* of the event which follows from such decrees, than the absolute foreknowledge of God." We are, by no means, to conclude from this, that he makes *no distinction* between foreknowledge and decree or purpose. He fully admits, that the one does not, like the other, cause an event to be certain. But he maintains, that "the connection between the event and certain foreknowledge is as *infallible* and indissoluble, as between the event and an absolute decree." This







known. Therefore there must be a certainty in things, to be a ground of certainty of knowledge, and to render things capable of being known to be certain. And this is nothing but the necessity of the truth known, or its being impossible but that it should be true ; or, in other words, the firm and infallible connection between the subject and predicate of the proposition that contains that truth. — If God certainly knows the future existence of an event which is wholly contingent, and





prescience; and that they are certainly future, in the order of time, antecedent to their existence.”

“*Mere certainty of event,*” says Dr. Samuel Clarke, “does not, in any measure, imply necessity.” But certainty of event is the *very thing* which President Edwards, in speaking on this point, means by necessity. Some writers assert, “That when we talk of foreknowledge in God, there is no strict propriety in our so speaking : and that although it be true, that there is in God the most perfect knowledge of

all events from eternity to eternity, yet there is no such thing as *before* and *after* in God, but He sees all things by one perfect, unchangeable view, without any succession.”

On this, Edwards observes; “If strictly speaking, there is no foreknowledge in God, it is because those things which are future to us, are as present to God, as if they already had existence: and that is as much as to say, that future events are always, in God’s view, as evident, clear, sure, and necessary, as if they already were.—This is

















which directs his choice? Or are we to understand the assertion to signify, that the will is so evenly balanced, that it will turn this way or the contrary, regardless of all influence whatever?

The objection which is urged against the extension of the divine purposes to the volitions of men, that it would render *the use of means unavailing*, is equally applicable to certain foreknowledge. Acts of the will which are foreknown are certain, either *without* means, or *by* means. If they are









is the *man himself* that wills. The very definition with which he commences his work implies, that it is the agent, the mind, that chooses. "The will is plainly that by which the *mind* chooses anything. — In every act of the will whatsoever, the *mind* chooses one thing rather than another." If this is all that is meant by some writers, in earnestly contending that a man is the *cause* of his own volitions, Edwards has no controversy with them, on this point; unless it may be as to the propriety of this











upon something *without* the mind.

But what *are* the causes and influences which give direction to choice? According to Edwards, the human mind is of such a nature, and is placed in such circumstances. that it will certainly *be pleased* with some of the objects which are presented to its view, and displeased with others. With some, it will be *more* pleased, than with others. Those with which it is *most* pleased, it will desire to obtain. This will stimulate to such mental and bodily actions as are





from choosing as he pleases, so long as he chooses at all. His imperative volitions correspond with his prevailing inclinations;—with what is to him the greatest apparent good. His emotions, which are considered by some as acts of will, are so far from being contrary to his pleasure, that his pleasure *consists* of emotions. But a man has not the liberty of perfect *indifference* to all the objects around him. He has not such a liberty that he ever chooses in opposition to all the



















proceeds to inquire,  
“Whether any *such* liberty  
of will as Arminians hold,  
be necessary to MORAL  
AGENCY, VIRTUE AND VICE,  
PRAISE AND DISPRAISE,  
&c.”

## SECTION 12: MORAL AGENCY NOT INCONSISTENT WITH ALL NECESSITY.

*Moral agency not inconsistent with all necessity — God's moral excellence, though necessary, is yet virtuous — Authority of Dr. Samuel Clarke — In what sense, is it impossible for God to do wrong? — Are all things necessary? — Is it desirable that human volitions should depend primarily on chance, rather than on infinite*















as Edwards observes, “The infinitely holy God, who always used to be esteemed, by God’s people, not only virtuous, but a being in whom is all possible virtue, and every virtue in the most absolute purity and perfection, and in infinitely greater brightness and amiableness than in any creature ; the most perfect pattern of virtue, and the fountain from whom all others’ virtue is but as beams from the sun ; and who has been supposed to be, on the account of his virtue and holiness,



that to suppose it *impossible* for God to choose otherwise than He does, is *limiting his power*; that to affirm, that the only reason why He does not do wrong is that He *cannot*, is derogatory to his character. Now all the apparent difficulty in this case, lies in the ambiguity of the terms impossible, cannot, &c. The objection might be brought, with equal propriety, against the assertion of the scriptures, that “it is *impossible for God to lie*.” If the words power, possibility, &c., be understood according to



ability to do wrong. There is nothing in his nature which will ever *incline* Him to depart from perfect rectitude. On the contrary, there is that in his being and attributes which will forever and invariably determine Him to do right. There is as absolute a certainty that He will never do wrong, as that He will never cease to exist. This certainty is what Edwards means by the moral necessity of the divine nature. Will any one affirm that this certainty does not exist? If it be thought improper to call it

*necessity*, I have no controversy with any one on this point. But is *such* an inability an imperfection in the character of the Most High ? Does it imply any want of freedom, that “He *cannot* but do always what is best and wisest in the whole ; that He *cannot possibly* do anything that is evil; that an infinitely wise and good being cannot act in contradiction to wisdom and goodness?” “It is no diminution of power,” says Dr. Clarke, “not to be able to *do* things which are no object of power: And it is in

like manner no diminution either of power or liberty, to have such a perfect and unalterable rectitude of will, as never possibly to *choose* to do anything inconsistent with that rectitude.”

To Edwards’s view of the necessity of the divine will, it is objected, that on this supposition, *everything in the universe is necessary* ; nothing in heaven or on earth could possibly have been different from what it is. The eternal *existence* of the Supreme Being, his infinite *intelligence*, and *power*, and *goodness*, are





let his definition, “infallible certainty,” be substituted. Is it objected, that the wisdom and goodness of God are so immutable and boundless, as to render it absolutely certain, that the decisions of His will must forever be right? Would it be better that it should be *doubtful*, whether He will invariably adhere to perfect rectitude? Perhaps the objector has a special reference to the volitions of finite agents, bringing the charge against Edwards, that according to his views, particular acts of choice will certainly follow from

the nature and state of the agent, and the circumstances in which he is placed; that every volition is owing to some cause or causes, forming part of a series of causes *originating* in the great First Cause. The objection must apply either to the *certainty* of volitions, or to their certain *dependence* on their causes. If acts of the will are uncertain, then all events which *depend* on these acts, and of course, the most important changes in the moral world are uncertain. Is this a state of things so greatly to be









Supreme Being, because there is *evil* in the world, and He is the author of nothing but good. It must be admitted, that all the trains of causes which proceed from him are productive of good; and that they are introduced into the created system *for the sake* of the good which they produce. But when we consider the endless variety of these causes, and their innumerable relations and combinations with each other, how does it appear, that *all* their effects must be such as a benevolent mind would





good, while they are the occasion of no evil ? So far as we can form an opinion, from the actual state of the world, those gifts of the Creator which are the means of our enjoyment, furnish the principal temptations to iniquity. Do you say that infinite wisdom and goodness cannot be the cause of anything which is the cause of evil ? Then you must either deny that he is the Creator of men, or that men are the causes of their own sinful acts. If there can be nothing in the effect which is not found in the





Episcopius in particular; and because I look upon it as a point clearly and absolutely determining the controversy between Calvinists and Arminians, concerning the necessity of such a freedom of will, as is insisted on by the latter, in order to moral agency.”

He then proceeds, in the second place, “to consider whether Christ, in his holy behavior on earth, was not thus a moral agent, subject to commands, promises, &c. — Dr. Whitby,” he observes, “very often speaks of what he calls a freedom *ad utrumlibet*,



















## SECTION 13: ACCOUNTABILITY AND MORAL INABILITY.

*Comparison of Edwards's scheme of moral agency with that of his opponents — Is it essential to accountability, that every volition should be determined by a preceding volition? — A man's volitions are from himself — Does the moral character of all our volitions depend upon a commanding purpose ; or upon anything preceding? — Is the Arminian notion*











his opponents. The question between him and them is not, Whether the acts for which a man is accountable, are acts of his *own will*, volitions which he himself puts forth. In this, the parties are agreed. But according to Edwards, the man is *induced* to will as he does, by some motive. He seeks to obtain one object rather than another, because he is *better pleased* with the one than with the other. And he is better pleased with some things than with others, because the nature and state of his mind are such,

that some things are better fitted than others to give him pleasure. The certain dependence of our choice upon motives, is what Edwards calls moral necessity. The opposite doctrine implies, that there is no such certain dependence; that choice is not determined by anything preceding; or if any dependence at all be admitted, that it cannot be traced back beyond the agent himself. If there is no dependence of volition on anything preceding, then the man wills with absolute contingency or accident.



more plain, than that laws can be of no use to direct and regulate perfect accident.—The end of laws is to bind *to one side*; and the end of commands is to turn the will one way: and therefore, they are of no use, unless they turn or bias the will that way.”

It may be said, that a man is accountable for his acts of choice, because *he determines them himself*. This must mean either

That it is he himself that chooses, or

That his choice is dependent on nothing preceding; or

That it is determined by a previous act or state of his own mind.

The second supposition is that of volition by pure accident. The first is precisely the doctrine of Edwards, that the man is accountable because he wills. According to the third supposition, every volition for which a man is accountable, must be determined, either by a preceding volition, or purpose, or affections, or views of the understanding, or some state of the mind of which we are not conscious, or the nature









determining choice in the affair, is not from his choice: His choice is not the cause of it. And if it be from himself *some other way*, and not from his choice, surely that will not help the matter.” [Part IV, Sec. 13.]

It has been said, that particular volitions, whether they be imperative acts, or affections, may be virtuous or sinful, because they proceed from a *commanding purpose*. The robber has formed a resolution to plunder, whenever he has a favorable opportunity. The

miser has come to a determination to direct all his efforts to the accumulation of property. The foreign missionary has consecrated his powers and attainments to the conversion of the heathen. The actions of these men, from day to day, are regulated by the governing purpose of their lives. This controlling resolution, it is said, gives the moral character to the particular acts which it determines. But what renders the man accountable for the predominant purpose itself? What has















to be one way rather than another. Is this an essential condition of accountability ? Is a man no moral agent, has he no freedom of will, unless he is free from all directing influence of motives ?

Between the two suppositions, that acts of choice are dependent on something preceding, and that they are fortuitous, there is no other alternative ; unless it be, that they are *partly* dependent and partly fortuitous. The opponents of Edwards will, perhaps, admit of dependence *for a*

*few steps*, provided that it is carried back so far only, that it breaks off *within* the mind of the agent. Dependence upon anything *without*, is thought to be inconsistent with accountable agency. Let us suppose, then, that imperative acts are determined by the predominant purpose, and that this is determined by preceding affections; but that the affections themselves spring up fortuitously. Then the whole together are primarily dependent upon nothing. The affections



opposite direction. They are under the irresponsible dominion of nonentity.

It is claimed, that a man is under no obligation to do that which he has no *ability* to do ; in other words, that "obligation is commensurate with ability." There can be no question respecting this, if the term ability is understood to be here confined to its proper signification, to what President Edwards denominates *natural* inability.' "No inability whatsoever," he observes, "which is merely moral, is













both together. Does  
accountable agency  
require, that there should  
be nothing in the nature, or  
state, or temper, of a man's  
mind, which will incline  
him to will one way rather  
than another? Are the  
patriot and the traitor  
deserving of neither praise  
nor reproach, if their  
hearts have inclined them  
to opposite courses of  
conduct. Are a man's  
actions neither morally  
right nor wrong, if he is  
subject to any directing  
influence from without ;  
from the calls of ambition,  
or interest, or pleasure ;















criminality in his *resolving* to produce a conflagration, unless he was equally inclined to make a contrary resolution? Was there nothing vile in the passions which excited him to the work of destruction, if he had not, with the same external motives before him, an equal susceptibility of opposite emotions? Does the power of contrary choice consist in a faculty of willing *against* influence; or in being always under *equal* influences, of opposite tendencies; so that there can be no inducement of



him. But this, it is thought, is not sufficient to render him accountable for his acts. Some farther control is deemed necessary. In what then, must this consist ? The way in which we control events, is by the *will*. If the agency of the will in making a choice is not sufficient, what other agency of ours is there, that gives us the control of our volitions ? Is it a *preceding* volition ? How can we be accountable for *this*, unless we have the control of it by another, and of that by another still, &c., thus running accountability

back, through an interminable series of volitions ? If it be said, that a man's acts of will are controlled by the *state* of his mind, as affected by the various objects presented to his view; this is the very control for which Edwards contends. This state of the mind is neither self-created, nor the product of chance. The principal point aimed at by the objector probably is to maintain, that no *other* control of volitions, except that which is exercised by the agent himself, is consistent with accountability. But on this

supposition, virtue and vice, merit and guilt, are primarily dependent on *nothing*; they belong to the boundless domain of chance; a man is sinful or holy, because he *happens* to will as he does.

The objection which we have just been considering is frequently expressed in different terms, by saying that we cannot be accountable for our acts of choice, unless they *originate* with us. If this means nothing more than that we are the proper *authors* of our own volitions, the proposition is







remote act that it is exposed to, but not its own present act.—Though it is impossible there should be any true, sincere desires and endeavors against a present volition or choice; yet there may be, against volitions of that kind, when viewed at a distance. A person may desire, and use means, to prevent future exercises of a certain inclination; and in order to it, may wish the habit might be removed; but his desires and endeavors may be ineffectual.”

The distinction between the proper and the

















remotely, on the account of something alien and foreign.—Therefore, on the whole it is manifest, that *moral* inability alone (which consists in disinclination) never renders anything improperly the subject matter of precept or command, and never can excuse any person in disobedience, or want of conformity to a command. *Natural* inability, arising from the want of natural capacity, or external hindrance, (which alone is *properly* called inability,) without doubt wholly





immediately required by command; and other things only indirectly, as connected with the will. Both these kinds of natural inability that have been mentioned, and so all inability that excuses, may be resolved into one thing ; namely, want of natural capacity or strength ; either capacity of understanding, or external strength.” He closes the section under consideration by observing ; “If things for which men have a moral inability, may properly be the matter of precept or command, then they may also of *invitation*











of will is an incapacity of choosing either right or wrong. It relates to both alike. But *moral* inability prevents a man from choosing right, while he has the inclination as well as capacity to make a wrong choice. Whether we admit or deny the propriety of this application of the terms natural and moral, it concerns us to know whether we are not accountable for our volitions, unless, in addition to the faculty of willing, we have susceptibilities not only inclining us towards that

which is right, but inclining us *as strongly at least*, as other susceptibilities incline us towards that which is wrong. Are we free from guilt, in all cases in which the inducements to obey God have less influence upon us, than the motives to disobey him? In other words are we under no obligations to choose right, except when we actually choose right? Does accountability imply, that we have not only a *capacity* to do right, but the inclination also, or the susceptibilities, or balance of susceptibilities on which





## SECTION 14: SINCERITY, INDIFFERENCE, HABITS, MOTIVES, &C.

*Sincerity of desires and endeavors — Is equilibrium of will essential to liberty? — Are virtuous or vicious habits or inclinations inconsistent with moral agency? — Is the influence of motives and inducements inconsistent with liberty? — Circumstances and the state of the mind together determine volition — Different degrees of influence in motives —*

























suppose ; it will follow, that it is essential to a virtuous action, that it be performed in a state of indifference: And if it be performed in a *state* of indifference, then doubtless it must be performed in a *time* of indifference. And so it will follow, that in order to the virtuousness of an act, the heart must be indifferent in the time of the performance of that act; and the more indifferent and cold the heart is, with relation to the act which is performed, so much the better; because the act is performed with so much











inclination *may* be so strong as to be invincible, and leave no possibility of the will's determining contrary to it; and so be attended with necessity.

Therefore, if necessity be inconsistent with liberty, then when fixed inclination is to such a degree of strength, it utterly excludes all virtue, vice, praise, or blame.”

To the objection, “that however the forementioned reasons will prove, that no habits which are *natural*, or that are born or created with us, can be either virtuous or vicious; yet they









actions.” He here brings into view *external circumstances*, in connection with the state of the mind, as having an influence in determining the will. They, as well as “virtuous and vicious habits and dispositions,” may have a *tendency*, *previous* to particular acts of choice, to turn the will in one direction rather than another. It is evident indeed, that Edwards does not consider these habits and dispositions as having an influence *independent* of circumstances. “It is equally against those

















from these, they are not from the will's self-determining power.—This notion of liberty and moral agency frustrates all endeavors to draw men to virtue by instruction, or persuasion, precept, or example: For though these things may induce men to what is *materially* virtuous, yet at the same time, they take away the form of virtue, because they destroy liberty.”

"So it clearly follows from these principles, that God has no hand in any man's virtue, nor does at all promote it, either by a













their principles, it is absurd to suppose a virtuous act *with* a good intention or aim ; for to act for an end, is to act *from a motive*.— That act which is performed without inclination, without motive, without end, must be performed without any concern of the will. To suppose an act of the will without these, implies a contradiction.”

## SECTION 15: RELATION OF VIRTUE AND VICE TO THEIR CAUSE. NATURE OF AGENCY.

*Virtue and vice lie in the nature of man's volitions; not in their cause — Does a man's being influenced by motives imply that he is a mere passive agent? — Does a man's accountability depend on his being himself the cause of his volitions? — Virtuous or vicious acts may be the cause of other moral acts — The moral quality of external actions depends*





















supposition, man is not the cause of his volitions being one way rather than another; of their being virtuous or vicious. He is only the cause that there *are* volitions of some kind or other. The particular nature of these acts is a matter of pure accident. On what ground, is he responsible for volitions which are entirely fortuitous? In the language of Edwards, “It is a *contingence* that happens to the man, arising from nothing in him; and is necessary, as to any inclination or choice of his;



wickedness in the cause, that it produces wickedness. But it would imply a contradiction to suppose, that these two are the same individual wickedness. The wicked act of the cause, in producing wickedness, is one wickedness; and the wickedness produced, if there be any produced, is another.”

The *reason* why it is so frequently thought that the moral good or evil of internal inclinations and volitions lies not in their nature, but in their cause, Edwards supposes to be









act of will or choice, in order to their being justly blamed or praised. But it teaches no such thing with respect to the acts of the will themselves.”

## NATURE OF AGENCY.

In the second section of Part IV, Edwards examines the Philosophy of Mr. Chubb, respecting *action* and *agency*. The will it is claimed, is an *active* power, and therefore it cannot be *passive*. Activity is inconsistent with passiveness. That which is



though it is caused to act. The cannon shot is active, though it has no self-determining power to originate its own motion. The passions are active, though they are kindled by exciting occasions and objects.

But these, it may be said, are examples of *physical* agency. Whereas the activity of the *will* is of a character entirely different. It must be self-originated. It cannot be caused, without destroying its nature. Where, I would ask, is the *evidence* of these assertions? The proof















scheme of moral philosophy and divinity, is certainly to erect a mighty edifice on the sand, or rather on a shadow.”

To the objection, that action and passion are words of *contrary signification*, and therefore cannot both belong to the agent at the same time; the author replies: “That action and passion are doubtless, as they are sometimes used, words of opposite signification ; but not as signifying opposite *existences*, but only opposite *relations*. The words *cause* and *effect* are

terms of opposite signification ; but nevertheless, if I assert that the same thing may, at the same time, in different respects and relations, be both cause and effect, this will not prove that I confound the terms. The soul may be both *active* and *passive*, in the same thing, in different respects ; active with relation to one thing, and passive with relation to another.—It is no absurdity to suppose, that contrary relations may belong to the same thing, at the same time, with respect to different things.”



something within himself *different* from acts of will, this something, whatever it may be, is primarily dependent on something *without* himself. He does not *so originate* his choice, that it has no dependence on anything else. If the proposition is understood to signify, that God can create agents whose volitions shall spring forth *fortuitously*, without any dependence whatever upon anything preceding; either the nature, state, or temper of the mind, or external motives; and if this should be conceded, still it









## SECTION 16: DECISION OF COMMON SENSE.

*The phrase common sense, as it is sometimes used, is synonymous with intuition — More frequently, it means the practical judgment of common men on common subjects — The decisions of this kind of common sense are not infallible — It is not more to be relied on, upon all subjects, than the opinions of men of science — Difficulty of proposing philosophical questions, in such terms that they will*











which it is familiarly conversant. The most judicious practical men often differ from each other in their opinions; and their errors are frequently made evident, even to themselves, by the course of events. They may be more correct in their judgments on matters with which they are minutely acquainted, than philosophers and men of science, whose opinions may be affected by their favorite theories; and who are often too much engrossed with their own speculations, to admit of





diplomatic  
correspondence. *In  
connexion* with even those  
subjects on which we are  
all competent to form  
correct opinions, a  
speculating philosopher  
can start enquiries to which  
neither common sense, nor  
any other sense, can give a  
satisfactory answer.

The great obstacle in the  
way of obtaining a correct  
popular decision, on points  
of metaphysical  
speculation, is the almost  
insuperable difficulty of  
presenting the questions in  
terms which will not be  
misapprehended. The

language used must of course be that of common life; no other being intelligible to those to whom the appeal is made. The customary significations of the words in use among them, is so firmly fixed in their minds, that any attempt to make them comprehend the philosophical meanings of the same terms, will generally prove unavailing. A question proposed to them, they interpret according to their own understanding of the language, which may be widely different from the

intention of him who makes the inquiry. If metaphysicians find such difficulty in ascertaining each other's meaning, they ought not to be surprised, that they are misapprehended by those who are not skilled in their technical dialects. They have no just ground for claiming the verdict of common sense in favor of their positions, till they have good reason to believe that the common people distinctly understand what these positions are.

Of the illusion practiced upon common minds, by

giving a metaphysical meaning to a term in familiar use, we have a striking example in the word *necessity*. This, according to its original and literal meaning, as Edwards has justly observed, always implies *opposition* to the will, either actually existing, or at least *supposable*. In this sense, it forms a valid excuse for the neglect of that which, without such necessity, would be our duty. But metaphysicians have taken the liberty to apply the term to a case in which this essential





























and under different circumstances, will be invariably followed by the same volitions. It is certain, that this will not be the fact. The merry song, which is welcomed by the man of gaiety, in his hours of festivity, will excite very different emotions in the mind of the same individual, if it meet his ear when under the pressure of heavy affliction. The shout of victory, which fires the breast of the conqueror, sends terror and dismay to the hearts of the vanquished. The hours of darkness, which invite the



given, the agent will certainly will in one particular way.

“Another reason,” says Edwards, “why it appears difficult to reconcile it with reason, that men should be blamed for that which is necessary with a moral necessity, (which, as was observed before, is a species of philosophical necessity,) is, that for want of due consideration, men inwardly entertain that apprehension that this necessity may be *against men's wills* and sincere endeavors. They go away with that notion, that men















of things, in order to form their notion of faultiness or blameworthiness. They do not wait, till they have decided by their refinings, what first determines the will; whether it be determined by something extrinsic or intrinsic ; whether volition determines volition, or whether the understanding determines the will; whether there be any such thing as metaphysicians mean by contingency, (if they *have* any meaning;) whether there be a sort of a strange unaccountable sovereignty in the will, in

the exercise of which, by its own sovereign acts, it brings to pass all its own sovereign acts. They do not take any part of their notion of fault or blame from the resolution of any such questions. If this were the case, there are multitudes, yea, the far greater part of mankind, nine hundred and ninety nine out of a thousand, that would live and die without having any such notion as that of fault ever entering into their heads.—Nor is their notion of *an action* some motion or exercise that begins *accidentally*,













answer the purpose of exculpating the innocent, or fastening a sense of ill desert upon the consciences of the guilty; that it will not be adopted by common sense, as a rule for discriminating between crime and misfortune. The *terms* in which the distinction is expressed, it must be admitted, are not well chosen. They are liable to perversion, as Edwards has sufficiently shewn. He who is pressed with a load of guilt, may endeavor to throw off the burden, by pleading that all necessity is necessity, and that

whether natural or moral, it is alike inconsistent with accountability. But if a man is found in a horde of pirates, is it all one, whether he is there by his own will or against it; whether he was brought there by motives or by force; whether he loves their occupation or abhors it ? Is this a distinction without a difference ; a mere *metaphysical* line of discrimination? Does common sense never distinguish between want of inclination and want of opportunity; between the instigations of malice, and

the mistakes of ignorance; between the avarice which oppresses, and the poverty which brings suffering in its train? The real difference between natural and moral necessity, as explained by Edwards, is this, that the one may be entirely *against the will*, while the other cannot be ; the very consideration on which ill desert in the one case, and freedom from blame in the other, depends ; one of the most important and practical of all moral distinctions.

When a metaphysician endeavors to obtain the















antecedent to the act of choosing.

Is not the common *inclination* to exonerate ourselves from the charge of guilt, frequently mistaken for the judgment of common sense ? Does not this partiality in favor of our own character suggest the plea, that all inability, of whatever kind it may be, is inconsistent with obligation? In the appeals which are made to common sense, on the subject of moral agency, is it not sometimes the object to produce a popular *effect*, rather than to learn the



## SECTION 17: MEANS AND ENDEAVORS. FATALISM.

*On the principles of Edwards's opponents, means of grace are useless — They must be unavailing, unless there is a connection between means and ends — Misrepresentation of Edwards's views on this point — It is the doctrine of his opponents which breaks the connection between means and ends, so far as choice is concerned — It is his philosophy, and not theirs,*









volitions and the antecedents on which they depend. Among these antecedents, are the means which are used for the purpose of giving a direction to the will. But according to the opposite theory of volition, means and measures can do nothing more than give an *opportunity to?* the will to act. They do not incline it to choose one way rather than another. This would be considered inconsistent with freedom.

“The question to be answered,” says Edwards, “is, Whether, on the





















































certainly fail. How do we know this? That without the aid of divine grace, he will fail is admitted. But how do we know that this aid will not be granted, as soon as his attention is earnestly fixed upon what he is required to do ? Do you say, that while he is impenitent, he will never use the means of grace *aright*—that he will not be *sincere* in his professed endeavors to reform ? But how do we know, that God will not *give* him sincerity, and that immediately ? If you call upon him to pray, and to pray in a right

manner, how do you know that there will not be grace imparted to him, to incline him to worship in spirit and in truth ? Among the many reasons which may be offered, for urging sinners to immediate obedience and faith, there are two of great weight: First, it is their *duty*, for the neglect of which, even for a moment, they have no excuse. Secondly, there is hope, that they will actually comply with the call; not indeed in their own unaided strength, but with grace from above. It may be added, that if they do









and feelings, and under the same influence, human and divine, one man *happens* to repent, and another to persist in rejecting the offers of pardon ? Does not faithful dealing with the impenitent require, that we shew him distinctly, that he has not *such* a power to change his own heart as will effect the change without special divine interposition; that there is something, by whatever name it may be called, which now prevents, and forever will prevent him from turning to God in sincerity, unless he is

favoured with the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit; and that this dependence on divine influence, though it implies that which some call moral inability, is *no excuse* for a moment's continuance in sin?

## FATALISM.

Different methods of discussing the subject of the will, are adapted to the comprehension and taste of different classes of readers. While some are satisfied with nothing short







and decided advantages in the latter course. It is much easier. It saves time, investigation, and thought. It can be resorted to by those whose minds are very imperfectly disciplined, and who are very imperfectly qualified to examine the subject. It can be used by the tyro, as well as by the veteran in divinity. It requires little talent and little learning. It answers also, when argument fails; and it will often accomplish what argument would not do. There are many minds which would be influenced

by such a name, that would be little moved by an argument." [Biblical Repository for April, 1837, p. 411.] These remarks are applied by the writer, to *Pelagianism*, so often used as a term of reproach. They are equally applicable to the charge of Fatalism.

The point of resemblance between Fatalism and the doctrine of Edwards is, that according to both, events are *made certain* before they take place. The ground of *difference* between him and several classes of Fatalists is, that they believe in the certainty of



adopted, *would* be sufficient to change the result, as known to God; yet it is certain they *will not* be used. So also our *volitions* are certain, because the influences and state of mind on which they depend are certain.

There is a class of Fatalists, however, who maintain the necessary connection between events and their causes, yet trace back the series of causes, not to an omniscient and benevolent Creator, but to the nature and properties of *matter*, supposed to be eternal and self-existent.

These are the *Atheistical* Fatalists, against whom Cudworth, in his “Intellectual System of the Universe,” has employed his ample stores of learning, and his faculty of patient and thorough investigation. The whole of this elaborate work, with the exception of six or eight pages of introductory observations, is directed against this atheistical philosophy, with which Edwards’s views has no more affinity, than with the sublimations of alchymy. But the forms of Fatalism are so greatly diversified,

that a resemblance, in one or more points, may be traced, between some of them and almost any scheme of doctrine whatever. They furnish exhaustless supplies of offensive weapons, to those whose logical powers are principally displayed in dealing out opprobrious epithets to their opponents.

The phrase *fatal necessity* conveys to most minds the impression, that events to which it is applicable must inevitably take place, though ever so much *against our will*, and notwithstanding our most











will, in all its determinations and decrees whatsoever, is universally, certainly, and unalterably influenced by the superior fitness of things. Then there is nothing among all the works of God's creation, or his providence, or his government of creatures, through time or eternity, left free to him, with *a liberty of choice or indifference*. What strange doctrine is this, contrary to all our ideas of the dominion of God ? Does it not destroy the glory of his liberty of choice, and take



















## SECTION 18: EXISTENCE OF SIN UNDER THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

*All the actions of men are under the control of infinite wisdom and goodness — Does this make God the author of sin? — Permission of sin — No explanation of this subject is without its difficulties — Authority of Archbishop Whateley — The difficulties are not avoided by adopting the theory of contingent volition — Edwards does not hold that God is, in any*













his followers, gives the highest value to the doctrine of dependent volition is, that it places all the actions of accountable agents under the control of infinite wisdom and goodness. It represents the Supreme Disposer of events as holding in his power all the causes and occasions, the influence and motives on which the volitions of his creatures depend; so that, throughout the numberless worlds which he upholds and governs, not a purpose is formed, not a choice is made, which He has not











important kind; such as the moral actions of intelligent creatures, and their consequences. These events will be ordered by something. They will either be disposed by wisdom, or they will be disposed by chance ; that is, they will be disposed by blind and undesigning causes, if that were possible, and could be called a disposal. Is it not better, that the good and evil which happen in God's world, should be ordered, regulated, bounded, and determined, by the good pleasure of an infinitely wise being, who perfectly























High ; but on the contrary, arises from the withholding of his action and energy, and under certain circumstances, necessarily follows on the want of his influence ; this is no argument that He is sinful, or his operation evil.—It would be strange arguing indeed, because men never commit sin, but only when God leaves them *to themselves*, and necessarily sin when He does so, that therefore their sin is not *from themselves*.”

The opinions distinctly expressed by Edwards, in different parts of his work,













prevent it from doing mischief.

According to Edwards, “When God made man at first, he implanted in him *two kinds of principles.*” The *inferior*, or natural principles, are common to all men, good and bad; such as self-love, natural appetites and passions, &c. The *superior*, or spiritual principles, are peculiar to the virtuous. The inferior principles, when *left to themselves*, without the regulating, purifying, and harmonizing influence of the other, infallibly lead to sin. As the superior



objects with which we are surrounded. Without these, there would be neither holiness nor sin in our race; there would be no moral agency of any kind.

Thirdly, Edwards does not hold, that such an ordering and disposing of events, by divine wisdom, as that sin will certainly take place, is on account of any *good* which there is, either in *sin itself*, or in its *natural tendencies*. “Sin,” he says, “may be an evil thing, and yet that there should be such a disposal and permission, as that it should come to pass, may

be a good thing.” It is the *permission* of sin, not the sin itself; the will of God, not the act of the sinner, that is represented as good.

This brings us to the most difficult point on the freedom of the will; the most mysterious point, we may say, in the whole compass of theology; to the inquiry, *Why* has a God of infinite power and goodness, suffered that to take place which is wholly evil in itself, and in all its natural tendencies ? It becomes us to approach a subject so far transcending our powers of

comprehension, with  
humility and awe; to say of  
the righteous disposer of  
all events, how  
unsearchable are his  
judgments, and his ways  
past finding out. Can we  
attempt an explanation of  
this great mystery, the  
origin of evil, without  
incurring the hazard of  
saying that which will set  
limits either to the *power*  
or the *goodness* of the  
Ruler of the universe ? It  
becomes us to acknowledge  
the extent of our *ignorance*  
on the subject; rather than  
to advance any positive  
statements, with a

confident reliance on their correctness. We are here led to inquire,

**Fourthly,** Do the principles maintained in the preceding parts of Edwards's work imply, that sin is suffered to take place, *for the sake* of the sin itself, or even for the sake of the good which is to result from the *consequences* of sin. He holds that God disposes "the state of events in such a manner, for *wise, holy, and most excellent ends and purposes*, that sin, if it be permitted, or not hindered, will most certainly and













vows; yet upon the supposition which we are now considering, his fall will result in greater good, than would have followed from a steadfast adherence to the divine commands.

In answer to this, it will probably be said, that the *design* of the sinner is in direct opposition to the design of God, in permitting and overruling the sin. The intention of the sinner is always evil. The purpose of God is always benevolent. This evil design, on the part of the transgressor, is therefore to be deplored,























call for the extension of favor to the guilty. There would have been no transgressors needing forgiveness. Have we sufficient ground for affirming, that sin has been introduced for the express purpose of giving an opportunity for the exercise of pardoning grace; for the manifestation of that mercy which would never have been needed, if sin had been wholly excluded from the universe?

It may be said again, that the *justice* of God, his *abhorrence of iniquity*, and



his determination to *punish it*, are exhibited to his creatures, in a far more impressive manner than would have been possible, if sin had never been suffered to enter the divine kingdom. But for what purpose are the terrors of avenging justice displayed, if it be not to deter from the commission of iniquity ? This would have been needless, if sin could have been entirely prevented by other measures, not interfering with the direct means of holiness and happiness. Does God suffer the blessedness and glory



been no use for the influence of punishment. Do you say, that without the condemnation of some, others could not be preserved in unwavering obedience? This is admitting that sin and punishment are not introduced for the sole purpose of displaying the divine character.

What then *can be* the reason that sin has been suffered to come into the world, if God is able, in all cases, to prevent it; and if it has not been permitted, either for its own sake, or on account of its natural

tendencies, or because, by the overruling providence of God, greater good can be derived from it, than from perfect obedience in its stead ? There is yet another supposition, which it is believed, is not inconsistent with the great principle maintained by Edwards, that God has a controlling influence over human volitions. It is evident from the constitution and movements of the world around us, that in his unsearchable wisdom, He accomplishes his purposes, to a great extent, through











sometimes brings pestilence and death into our frame. The fire which is so necessary to our existence, is the same devouring element which consumes our dwellings, and carries devastation and wretchedness through our cities. The winds which waft to our shores the riches of foreign lands, often bury our ships in the waters of the deep. The same law of gravity which binds the hills to their foundations, and the ocean to its bed, drives the torrent forward in its work of desolation.







preservation and happiness, in the present state, are motives to intemperance and gluttony. The institution of *property*, without which the whole population of the globe must be reduced to the poverty and wretchedness of savages, and to one twentieth part of its present numbers, is the occasion of an incalculable amount of avarice, oppression, and sensuality. The knowledge of the being of a God, without which there could not be even a semblance of religion, is perverted to the vile















particular instances, as to secure perfect obedience, without affecting injuriously some other portion of his moral kingdom ?

According to the supposition just made, sin is not itself the means of the greatest good; but is the consequence of those *measures* which are the means of the greatest good. The supposition is indeed inconsistent with the doctrine, that sin is produced by the *immediate* agency of God. For if this were the fact, sin and its consequences must be *all*















way to escape from them, is to adopt the opposite principle of *contingent* volition. But if a different supposition, consistent with the dependence of volition upon preceding influence, is even *possible*, it effectually removes the foundation of these objections. This indeed does not establish the truth of the supposition *as a fact*, unless it can be shewn, that this is the *only* one not containing these difficulties, and yet consistent with the principles of dependent volition.













best manner, without means. There may be a difference between the highest *supposable* good of the universe, and that which can be actually attained, considering the limited natures and capacities of all created beings. There is no necessary limit to our suppositions, short, of an infinite number of beings, all infinitely great, holy, and happy, through the whole of an endless duration. But the actual system of the created universe, and we have reason to believe, every









accountable agents had been brought into being, none would have been liable to be punished for their iniquities. But now, the responsible nature which exalts the obedient to the blessedness of heaven, proves ruinous to multitudes of others. This must have been foreseen by Him who formed the spirit of man within him. Boundless goodness chose not to sacrifice the joys of the paradise above, even to avoid the tremendous evils which were to follow from the perversion of moral agency. If the objector

































adopting this opinion, by the formidable objections to which they think it is exposed, appear to find no way of escape from these difficulties, but by embracing the hypothesis, that God cannot interpose his agency, in the prevention of sin, without interfering with moral obligation. To maintain this position, they may sometimes resort to arguments which imply, that the Creator can exercise *no* effectual control over the volitions of his creatures. The two classes of theologians are



that He can prevent *all* sin, either in the best system of the universe, or in *any possible* moral system. They argue, that the providential dispensations which would be the most favorable to the prevention of sin, in some portions of his dominions, and in particular circumstances, might not be equally efficacious, in other portions, and in different circumstances; that the accumulation of influence upon certain individuals, might require a withdrawing of more or less influence from others ;

that the *punishment* of some may be necessary to preserve others from falling; that the sufferings of the eternal prison may be the means of guarding the hosts of heaven against revolt; that just punishment implies the existence of sin; that *all* sin cannot be prevented by punishing sin.

With *supposable* moral systems, we have little or no concern; unless, in reasoning upon them, arguments are used, which in their application to the existing system, may have an influence in favor of







ought to be content with referring it solely to the decision of his sovereign will; that we ought, with becoming reverence, to say, “Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” But we may at least be permitted to believe, that the system which *seems* good to infinite wisdom and benevolence *is really* so; that it is better than any which human ignorance can propose in its stead.

## TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE.

Too much space, perhaps, has already been occupied with *speculation* concerning the origin of evil. The results of our discussion of this subject can be of little or no value, except so far as they are found to accord with the testimony of scripture. He who gave to the soul of man all its powers and native propensities, and who, in the arrangements of his providence, brings before our minds, numberless objects which are fitted to have an influence on the will, surely knows what purposes He



testimony, or who, though they profess to do this, yet indulge in speculations which set aside the real meaning of scripture.

President Edwards has quoted largely from the Bible, in support of the opinions which he has adopted on this subject. How far are his positions sustained, by the authority of scripture ? In the first place, Does “God permit sin, and at the same time, so order things in his providence, that it certainly and infallibly will come to pass, in consequence of his permission?” By the

permission of sin, Edwards explains himself to mean “not hindering it.” There are numerous passages in the history of the King of Egypt by Moses, in which God declares that He *will* harden Pharaoh’s heart; and others in which it is stated that God *has* hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Of Sihon, King of Heshbon, it is said, that “the Lord hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate.” Of the Kings of Canaan it is recorded, that “it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in













duties to each other, God could not have so ordered the course of his providence, as to furnish subsistence for their families, during the season of scarcity which He knew to be approaching? The obstinacy of Pharaoh was overruled for good. “For this cause,” says the Almighty, “have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.” *[Exod. 9:16.]* But can we prove that if Pharaoh, when exalted to great authority and distinction,





perfectly obedient to his commands?

Fourthly, Is it revealed to us, that God *prefers* the disobedience of his creatures to their obedience, in every instance in which they actually sin? It is admitted, that He prefers not to interpose, in all cases, to *prevent* them from sinning. But does this imply, that He needs their sin, rather than their obedience, to answer the purposes of his unsearchable wisdom and goodness ? What saith the scripture? “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no











divine operations, are better than the results of a system so very different, as would be one which should prevent all sin.

When God had delivered to the children of Israel the ten commands, “out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness,” on Mount Sinai, he addressed Moses in these words, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep *all* my commandments *always*, that it might be well with them and their children forever.” [*Deut. 5:29, and*





way, rather than to make such a change in the plan of his dispensations, as would secure universal obedience to his will: but can they be made to agree with the assumption, that in the circumstances in which He has placed men, and under the influence which actually bears upon them, He prefers, in numberless instances, that they should disobey, rather than obey him ?



## SECTION 19: METAPHYSICAL REASONING.

*Is the religion of the Bible  
a metaphysical religion? —  
Is it to be supported by  
metaphysical reasoning?  
— The scriptures take  
some things for granted,  
as already known to the  
reader — Application of  
philosophical reasoning to  
the interpretation of  
scripture — Apparent  
discrepancy between  
declarations of scripture  
and scientific discoveries  
—Accommodating*









“Calvinistic principles” to which President Edwards refers, are commonly understood by their advocates to be principles of *theology*. Is theology then a metaphysical science? Is the *religion of the Bible* a metaphysical religion? Is its authority to be supported by metaphysical and philosophical reasoning? At the present day, when there is so much discussion and controversy respecting the connection of philosophy with religion, it is important that we have a distinct understanding of



the divine testimony, the truth of the doctrines revealed ?

We have no occasion, at present, to inquire concerning the philosophy of religion, any farther than it relates to *revealed* truth. The remarks now made are intended for those who, as Christians, believe that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and as Protestants, hold that this is a *sufficient* rule of faith and practice, "that the man of God may be perfect, *thoroughly furnished* to all good works." There may be religious truths,



discoverable by the light of nature, which are not contained in the scriptures. But they cannot be essential to salvation or holiness of life, as are the truths to which infinite wisdom has given the preference, in its message of mercy to our world ; which are accompanied with the sanctifying influence of the Spirit; and which have such an overpowering efficacy, in the conversion of the heathen. They have an influence which belongs to none of our finely-wrought metaphysical speculations.



apprehension of the meaning of words, does not imply a knowledge of all the truths which can be expressed in those words. An acquaintance with arithmetical numbers and their names, does not include all that can be known of arithmetic. A familiarity with the terms and definitions in Euclid's Elements, does not constitute all the knowledge which we can have of geometry. Several important doctrines which Christ himself taught, were in direct opposition to the previous opinions of his

hearers. The most sublime and surprising truths may often be expressed in terms perfectly familiar. It was the very design of a revelation intended for all mankind, to make known the high and wonderful purposes of heaven, in the simple language of common life. A knowledge of this language does not necessarily imply any special philosophical attainments; or any previous acquaintance with the truths to be revealed. There are some *very important* religious truths, such as those relating to

the divine attributes and works, which may be demonstrated by arguments not drawn from the scriptures. But these are so distinctly stated in the word of God, that they constitute a portion of revealed truth. In establishing the authority and inspiration of the Bible, there is a call for very various forms of reasoning, some of them complicated, but not commonly metaphysical, except when adduced in reply to metaphysical objections.

The most specious plea in



far as this is necessary to illustrate the nature and signification of language. The writers of the scriptures, though inspired of God, were themselves men, speaking to their fellow men, in the language of men. They spake and wrote with the intention of being understood. That kind of learning, therefore, which explains the language of the Bible, which shews the design, the views, and the situation, of the writers, which places us in the condition of the persons addressed, is of the highest











science? A distinction is here to be made, between those scriptural declarations the interpretation of which is *distinct and indubitable*, and others, the meaning of which is to us *obscure and doubtful*. There are no laws of interpretation by which we can determine the sense of *all* passages of the Bible, with equal certainty. In the exposition of different portions, there is *every degree* of evidence, from a bare probability, to that which admits not even a shade of doubt. The advocates of scriptural

authority on the one hand, and of the opposing claims of scientific discovery on the other, appear to have gone to opposite extremes, in their respective positions. The biblical interpreter avails himself of the unquestionable principle, that the scriptures are the word of a being who cannot err, and who will not deceive. Thus far, his ground is sure. To a passage of this perfect book, he applies the acknowledged rules of exegesis, till he thinks he has discovered its meaning. If you express a doubt with



unerring certainty of the divine declarations, we are not to infer the unerring certainty of our expositions. The proof which we have, that a particular doctrine is contained in a given passage is no greater, than the evidence that we have a correct knowledge of the *meaning* of the passage. This may be so imperfect, as to admit of being overbalanced by evidence of a different character. Calling in question any man's infallibility in the interpretation of scripture, is not calling in question

the omniscience or veracity of its divine Author.

There are, however, many passages of the Bible, concerning the true meaning of which, there can be no reasonable doubt. And though a particular doctrine may not always be found, with perfect certainty, in any *single* text; yet a comparison of different passages may furnish unquestionable proof, that it is contained in the Bible. In these cases, the evidence is not to be set aside, on account of any opposing evidence, short of that



which would be sufficient to bring in question the authority of the scriptures as a divine revelation. It is only in cases of *doubtful* interpretation, that the results of scientific inquiry can, with any propriety, be applied to the supposed testimony of scripture. When from the observed phenomena of the solar system, we arrive at the conclusion, that the earth revolves round the sun ; we may compare the degree of probability of this result, with exegetical proof, that according to the scriptures, the sun moves round the

earth. But many philosophers seem to think themselves authorized to explain away *any* passage of the word of God, however unequivocal may be its meaning, if it is not in accordance with their astronomical, or geological, or metaphysical theories. This is the other extreme, in relation to the comparative claims of scriptural and scientific results. The true medium is to estimate the degree of probability that we interpret the *works* of the Creator aright; and compare this with the

probability that we put a correct interpretation upon his *word*. The same perfect Being is the author of both. There can be no real inconsistency between them. If we think we have discovered that they are contradictory, it is certain that we have misconstrued either one or the other. On the one hand, very doubtful passages of scripture are not to be so understood, as to contradict the most evident laws of nature; nor, on the other hand, are philosophical or metaphysical hypotheses to be admitted, in opposition

to manifest declarations of scripture.

When an appeal is made to biblical testimony, in relation to any philosophical opinion, it is preposterous to *take it for granted*, that the language of the scriptures is to be so explained, as to accord with the opinion proposed. This is assuming that the position in question is already settled, independently of scriptural authority, which is made to yield to the superior authority claimed by philosophy. It is *explaining away* what we profess to



precepts the scriptures *probably* contain; and then set ourselves at work, to extort from them a meaning in conformity with the opinions which we have already formed. There is no text, however unequivocal its genuine meaning, which may not be made to yield to this transforming process. The word of God may be appealed to, in support of as many different systems of theology, as ardent theorists choose to propose. It is not unfrequently the case, that far greater liberties are



own unaided reason would never have discovered. We are not to learn what the signification of a passage is, by previously deciding what it *ought to be*.

The meaning of scripture is invariably the same; that which was given it when originally written. The same portion of the Bible has not different significations in different ages of the world; for different ranks in society ; for different denominations of Christians. Its import may be more correctly *understood*, at one time



than another. Different persons may give a true interpretation of the same text; and yet the knowledge of one respecting it may be far more comprehensive than that of the other. The “two great lights” and “the stars” which it is said God created, all understand to be the luminaries in the heavens above us. In this, the astronomer and the unlettered peasant agree. But they may have widely different opinions of the distances, magnitudes, and natures of these bodies. This implies, however, no disagreement with respect





scriptures. The *harmony* which exists between the truths presented in the word of God, and the light which shines upon us from his works and his providence, is a very proper subject of devout meditation. Philosophical explanations of scripture doctrines may be allowed, as gratifying a rational curiosity, if they are made to keep their proper place as ingenious speculations; and are not considered as necessary to establish our *belief* in these doctrines; nor so *blended* with the simple truths of revelation,



Lord.” When we have shewn that the Bible is the word of God, and have clearly ascertained the meaning of any portion of it, all reasonable inquiry concerning the *truth* of what we find there is at an end.

The differences of opinion which occasion such animated controversies, among the numerous divisions and subdivisions of parties in the Christian world, are frequently nothing more than different modes of *accounting* for doctrines in which most of the







them, that a doubt respecting a speculative theory, as certainly draws upon a man the imputation of heresy, as a rejection of the faith once delivered to the saints. If these points of ardent contention are *scriptural* truths, they can be supported by scriptural evidence. If they are not doctrines of scripture, let them have their proper rank among other inventions of philosophy.

The danger is great, that the system of truth which is revealed in the scriptures will be adulterated, by modifications and



course, imply a defense of the philosophical theories or hypotheses which have been proposed, to explain the grounds, and reasons, and causes, of what is revealed. Theoretical explanations are not the *evidence* on which our belief of these truths should rest. We are bound to receive them, on the simple testimony of God. The philosophical explanation which is *added* to the scriptural statement, is no part of the revelation. We may believe in the resurrection of the dead, without attempting to



revealed, that is, what is *made known to us*, we can certainly understand. In the common business and intercourse of life, we become acquainted with innumerable facts, that have causes, and consequences, and relations. which no philosophy can explain. Indeed *every* fact is connected, either immediately or remotely, with something else which is inexplicable. The nature of our minds, the power of life in our bodies, the air we breathe, the light of heaven, are full of

mysteries. If we could not understand anything, without being able to explain all its relations to other objects, we could know absolutely nothing.

Will it be said, that in this age of light and inquiry, there is no getting along without philosophical theology; that both Christians and opposers of the truth *will have their* theories; that if you do not furnish them with such as are sound, they will adopt those which are false and dangerous; that the doctrines of scripture will not be received, without

some theory to explain them ? Have we then come to this, that, with the Bible in our hands, philosophy is, after all, the foundation of our belief, and the guide of our conduct; that, though we profess to receive the scriptures as the word of the living God, yet we really give credit to his declarations, *so far only* as they conform to our preconceived philosophical opinions ; that the testimony of omniscience itself, is not sufficient to gain our assent to a doctrine, till our limited understandings have found

out a theory to explain it ?

Though we are bound to use great caution, that our philosophical speculations be not incorporated with scriptural truth ; yet it is in vain to think of keeping them so distinct, that no harm will be done, should they even *contradict* each other. We often hear it said, that a man's *theology* may be correct, though his religious *philosophy* be erroneous. This may be very true. A man may have searched the scriptures so diligently and faithfully, that he truly believes the great facts and doctrines









he comes to discover the contradiction will certainly loosen his hold of one or the other. Which of the two he will relinquish, will depend upon his regard for the authority of scripture, compared with the reliance which he places upon the results of his own speculations.

Nearly allied to the opinion, that a man's theology may be correct, while his religious philosophy is erroneous, is another; That if a man's belief in the doctrines of scripture is sound, his philosophy of those





The philosophy which is found *in the Bible itself* is as much a part of revelation, as the doctrines, the commands, or the predictions. We can no more be justified in rejecting any philosophical explanation contained in the scriptures, than in setting aside their historical or doctrinal statements. The one as well as the other, is a portion of that “faith once delivered to the saints” for which we are exhorted earnestly to contend. We are as much bound to receive the scriptural account of the





views, or by convincing them, that a God of eternal truth is to be believed, whatever becomes of *our* hypotheses and speculations. The former method will be of little use, without the latter. If you merely combat a man's particular sophistry, you may only induce him to shift his ground; to substitute one false scheme for another. It may sometimes be expedient to use means to *silence* those who array their metaphysical subtleties against the truths of revelation. It may be





















teach any such doctrines, so contrary to reason, we are obliged to find out some other interpretation of those texts, where such doctrines seem to be exhibited.” There is some advantage in occasionally meeting the objector on his own ground; in shewing him, that the assumptions which he makes are not even metaphysically supported. For this purpose, it is not necessary to demonstrate that they *must* be false. It is sufficient to show that they *may* be groundless. He who applies his

metaphysical speculations to the work of setting aside the natural construction of scripture, ought to be *sure*, that there is no defective link in his chain of argument.

We sometimes hear persons speak of what they are pleased to denominate Edwards's *theory* of the will; as though it were his design to propose and maintain a philosophical system of his own ; whereas it was his proposed aim to examine the theories of *others* on the subject. The title of his work, is, "A careful and



are results of arguments against the theories of others, rather than principles which it was the professed object of the work to establish.

The defenders of Calvinistic doctrines are sometimes represented as having substituted metaphysical reasoning for the plain common sense views of religious truth. In reference to this, Edwards observes, “I humbly conceive the foregoing reasoning, at least as to those things which are most material belonging to it, depends on no abstruse















**SECTION 20:**  
**APPLICATION OF THE**  
**PRINCIPLES WHICH HAVE**  
**BEEN DISCUSSED TO**  
**PARTICULAR DOCTRINES.**

*The moral government of God — Total depravity — Efficacious grace — Is it the grace of God, or the agency of the sinner, that determines whether he shall be converted or not? — Is the grace of God irresistible? — The decrees or purposes of God — Personal election — Conditional election — The final perseverance of*



to be their natural and true signification.

The first inference which he draws from his examination of the subject is the doctrine, “That God’s moral government over mankind, his treating them as *moral agents*,—is not inconsistent with a *determining disposal* of all events, of every kind, throughout the universe, in his providence; either by positive efficiency or permission.” The scriptures, in speaking of the purposes and agency of God, in relation to the hearts and actions of men,





preconceived and settled opinion, that such a doctrine *cannot* be true, and therefore, cannot be found in the oracles of God?

The next application of the results of Edwards's reasoning, in his work on the Will, is to the scriptural representations of the "*total depravity and corruption of man's nature*, whereby his heart is wholly under the power of sin, and he is utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace, savingly to love God, believe in Christ, or do

anything that is truly good and acceptable in God's sight. This doctrine supposes no other necessity of sinning, than a *moral* necessity ; which, as has been shewn, does not at all excuse sin ; and supposes no other inability to obey any command, or perform any duty, even the most spiritual and exalted, but a moral inability, which, as has been proved, does not excuse persons in the non-performance of any good thing."

The uniform tendency to sin, from which none of our race are exempt, till they



*grace*.—God gives virtue, holiness, and conversion to sinners, by an influence which determines the effect in such a manner, that the effect will *infallibly follow* by a moral necessity ; which is what Calvinists mean by efficacious and irresistible grace.” Do you inquire, whether the effect here spoken of is produced by divine influence *alone*, without the concurring agency of him who is renewed? It is not produced without the *consequent* agency of the man ; for his agency in turning to God is the very

effect which is produced. “The main thing meant by the word efficacious,” says Edwards, “is this, it being *decisive*.— That cause only can be said to be an efficacious cause, whose efficacy determines, reaches, and produces, the effect.—The grand point of the controversy really is, what is it that determines, disposes, and *decides* the matter, whether there shall be saving virtue in the heart or not.” [*Efficacious Grace*, Sec. 38, 61, 63.] The question is, whether it is the grace of God, or agency of man, that determines









the purpose of God to convert him shall be effectual or not ? Is it not his refusal or compliance that decides the point ? To this I answer: that it is the very object of renewing grace to *prevent* a refusal on the part of the sinner, and to *secure* his compliance. The agency of the man in repenting no more determines whether the agency of the Spirit shall be effectual, than any other effect determines whether it shall be produced by its cause. Every effect, by taking place, *gives evidence* of the

efficacy of its cause. But this does not imply, that it belongs to the effect to determine whether its cause shall be efficacious or not.

This brings us to the question so frequently agitated. Whether the grace of God is *irresistible*, as well as efficacious ; a correct answer to which depends principally on an explanation of the meaning of the term. Are we to understand irresistible grace to be that to which *no opposition* can be made ; or that to which no *such* opposition can be made, as









God's being the author, efficient, and bestower of any kind of benefit, than as to the bestowment of true virtue or goodness of heart." [*Efficacious Grace, Sec. 27.*] "The main objection of Arminians against this doctrine is, that it is inconsistent with their self-determining freedom of will; and that it is repugnant to the nature of virtue, that it should be wrought in the heart, by the determining efficacy and power of another, instead of its being owing to a self-moving power." For an answer to this

objection, he refers to the discussion in the preceding parts of his work.

The reasonings of Edwards which obviate the objections that are commonly brought against a divine providence and influence, determining the actions of accountable agents, have a similar application to what are called the decrees of God, or more properly his *purposes*. If the freedom and accountability of men are not inconsistent with his agency in inclining their wills, neither are they inconsistent with his



*purpose* to incline them. Whatever it is right for God *to do*, it is right for Him to *purpose* to do. If it is, at any time, right for Him to *purpose* to influence the hearts of his creatures, it has been *forever* right for him thus to *purpose*. “And as nothing is new in God, in any respect,” says Edwards, “but all things are perfectly and equally in his view from eternity; hence it will follow, that his designs or purposes are not things formed anew, founded on any new views or appearances, but are all *eternal* purposes.” There is

nothing, however, in the statements of Edwards, which countenances the absurd supposition, that God purposes the *end*, without regard to the *means* by which the end is to be obtained. The means and the end are equally objects of his purpose.

Among the immutable purposes of God, is to be included his determination respecting the individuals of our race who shall be finally saved. The opinion of Edwards and other Calvinists on this point, is what is commonly denominated the doctrine





sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.” [2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2.]

The election of which we are speaking, is not merely a *conditional* election ; a purpose to save certain individuals, *provided* they comply with the offers of the gospel. It is a determination to *render* them obedient; to *secure* their acceptance of the terms of salvation. Our Savior not only says, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” but also, “All that the Father giveth me *shall* come to me ;— and, This is the Father’s



not conferred upon all. The *offers* of the gospel are made to multitudes who are not elected. “Many are called, but few chosen.—There is a remnant, according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works.—Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh ; but the *election* hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” [*Rom. 11:5, 6, 7.*] This electing purpose is not made *arbitrarily*, without good and sufficient reasons; reasons by which infinite wisdom and benevolence are guided,





that if a man is elected he will be saved, whatever he may do, or whatever he may neglect to do. He is as truly elected to holiness of life, as to final salvation ; and as truly elected to the proper use of means, as to the sanctification which, with the divine blessing, results from their use. "Give diligence," says the apostle, "to make your calling and election sure."

The purpose of God to sanctify and save the elect is not inconsistent with their *freedom and accountability*. For if, by his efficacious grace, He

can secure their repentance, and obedience, without impairing their freedom, his *purpose* to do this, cannot interfere with their accountable agency. With their own free choice, they accept of offered mercy, and devote their lives to the service of God. They choose to be saved in the way which He has appointed. They desire to be delivered from sin, as well as from punishment. They are not compelled to be saved against their will; nor do they believe and obey against their will.

If human volitions are

contingent, so that nothing exterior to the mind of the agent can have any influence in giving direction to his choice ; personal election must either be nothing more than God's determination to save those only who He *foresees* will happen to become holy ; or it must be a purpose to give eternal life to certain individuals, whether they become holy or not. The latter is the doctrine so unjustly imputed to Edwards and his followers, and by them so distinctly disavowed and condemned.



the mercy, which others have been induced to accept. Salvation is offered to them upon the same terms as to the elect. The purpose of election is not the ground of their condemnation ; nor does it prevent them from believing and obeying. No injustice is done to them, in leaving them to the retribution of law, when they refuse to accept of forgiveness according to the provisions of the Gospel. They have no right to demand, that God shall either bestow his renewing grace upon all or upon





promised, that by his efficacious grace, He will *secure* to believers their compliance with the conditions of salvation. It is declared not only that “he that shall endure unto the end shall be saved,” but that the elect are “kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation :—The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,—though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down.—Being confident of this very thing,” says the Apostle, “that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it unto the day of







nothing in heaven or on earth can secure the continued fidelity of the Christian, even for a single hour. If he happens to remain faithful through life, his perseverance is to be ascribed to the determination of chance.

But if God, by his efficacious grace, can secure the *commencement* of holiness in the heart, without impairing the freedom and accountability of the agent, He can *continue* this work of mercy from day to day, and from year to year, even to the end of life, without

interfering with the liberty of the will. The same arguments of Edwards which go to shew, that the renewing grace of God is not inconsistent with accountable agency in the creature, may, with equal propriety, be applied to the doctrine of perseverance.

Edwards appears to have anticipated, with prophetic discernment, the kind of reception which his opponents would give his work. In his concluding remarks, he observes, "Whether the things which have been alleged are liable to any tolerable answer, in



much about it, they may probably renew the usual exclamations, with additional vehemence and contempt, about the *fate of the heathen*, Hobbes's *necessity*, and *making men mere machines* ; accumulating the terrible epithets of *fatal, unfrustrable, inevitable, irresistible, &c.*”

**THE END.**

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